BULGARIAN CULTURAL IDENTITY, BALKANISM AND SELF-COLONISATION IN BULGARIAN TV SERIES STAKLEN DOM (2010-2012)

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Tutkimuksessa käsittelen suosittua bulgarialaista televisiosarjaa hyödyntäen *balkanismin* ja *itsekolonisaation* teorioita löytääkseni merkkejä 2010-luvun bulgarialaisen kulttuuri-identiteetin rakentumisesta. Näiden teorioiden mukaan “Balkan” on käsitteellistetty sivistymättömänä ja jälkeenjääneenä kulttuurillisena alueena, josta “sivistyneen Euroopan” ongelmat juontavat. Länsieurooppalainen kulttuurihegemonia määrittelee aina itsensä “sivistyksen” ja “edistyksen” keskiöön, ja siitä poikkeavat periferiaan. Periferiakulttuurit puolestaan muodostavat kulttuuri-identiteetin, joka perustuu vieraisiin arvoihin ja on aina puutteellinen ja kehittymätön suhteessa keskukseen. Itsekolonisoivat kulttuurit jäljentävät vahingollista käsitystä minuudestaan luontaisesti puutteellisena, mikä johtaa kolonisaatioon ilman hyökkäystä – alistumiseen “lännen” kulttuurihegemonian edessä.

Tutkimuksessa käsittelen neljää tuotantokautta draamasarjasta Staklen dom (suom. Lasitalo), joka on yksi suurimmista televisioproduktioista 2010-luvun Bulgariassa. Tapahtumat sijoittuvat sofialaiseen ostoskeskukseen, jonka omistajat ja työntekijät ovat sarjan päähahmoja. Sarjan nimi viittaa ostoskeskuksen lasiseen arkkitehtuuriin, mutta samalla kommentoi perinteisten arvojen haurautta modernissa, individualistisessa ja kulutusmyönteisessä maailmassa. Staklen domin juonessa heijastuvat Bulgarian ajankohtaiset yhteiskunnalliset kysymykset, joten se tarjoaa mahdollisuuden tutkia bulgarialaisten käsityksiä omasta kulttuuristaan taiteen keinoin.

Tutkimusaineisto koostuu noin 65 tunnista videokuvaa, josta olen analysoinut käsikirjoitusta, tarinankerrontaa ja kuvamateriaalia teoria-aineiston avulla. Tutkimuksessa käytetty dialogikäsikirjoitus on jaoteltu kahdeksaan teemaan: Bulgaria alueena ja sijaintina; bulgarialaiset kansana, ryhmänä tai yhteisönä; bulgarialaisen kulttuurin tuotteet ja symbolit; balkanistinen tai orientalistinen diskurssi; jaetun kulttuuritilan ajattomuus ja pysähtyneisyys; jaettu kulttuuritila väli- ja siirtymätilana, symbolisena siltana tai risteyksenä; siirtolaiskokemus ja sen toiseuttaminen; sekä etnisten vähemmistöjen ja “kyläläisten” toiseuttaminen.

Tutkimus osoittaa, että bulgarialainen kulttuuri-identiteetti muodostuu kamppailussa kulttuurillisten, taloudellisten ja poliittisten voimien risteyksessä. Euroopan laajuisen kansallisen heräämisen ja balkanistisen käsityksen valossa Bulgarian anti omalle kulttuuriperinnölleen on näyttäytynyt vähäiseltä ja kiusalliselta myös aikalaistensa silmissä. Neuvostoliiton vallan alla bulgarialaisuus oli osa suurempaa slaavilaisuutta, mutta vuoden 1989 jälkeen neuvostoajan perintö jouduttiin kieltämään kokonaan, jotta Bulgaria voisi demokratisoitua ja modernisoitua. Bulgarian NATO- ja EU -pyrkimykset kertovat siitä, että bulgarialaisen jälkisosialistisen yhteiskunnan katse on suunnattu länteen, mutta länsi ei katso suopeasti takaisin.

Aineiston pohjalta voidaan tulkita, että sosioekonomiset kysymykset ovat tiukasti sidottuna kulttuurisiin kysymyksiin vallitsevan kulutusyhteiskunnan myötä, mutta myös Bulgarian viimeisen 40 vuoden poliittisen ja yhteiskunnallisen tilanteen johdosta. Bulgarian siirtymä sosialismista liberaalidemokratiaan ja suunnitelmataloudesta markkinatalouteen on ollut kivulias, jonka takia yhteiskunnan rakenteet eivät edelleenkään heijasta bulgarialaisten monimuotoisuutta ja edistä valinnanvapautta tai turvallisuudentunnetta. Tämä näkyy sarjan esittämässä identiteettien keskeneräisyydessä, ylistyspuheessa kapitalismille ja alistumisessa itsekolonisaatioon.

Tutkimusaineistosta voidaan havaita, että muinaisen (bulgarialaisen) kulttuurin symbolit ovat modernissa kontekstissa vanhanaikaisia ja uudet symbolit ovat löytyneet globaalista kulutusyhteiskunnasta. Tämä puolestaan on aiheuttanut jonkinasteisen eksistentiaalisen kulttuuri- ja identiteettikriisin. Ongelma on maailmanlaajuinen, mutta bulgarialaisessa kontekstissa erityisen vahingoittava, sillä samainen kulttuuri ja identiteetti ovat alun perin vahvasti balkanismin perintöön perustuvia uudelleen esitettyjä olemassaolon kuvauksia. Aineistossa näkyy myös selkeästi Bulgarian etnisten vähemmistöjen sekä paluumuuttajien toiseuttaminen nationalistisen ja poissulkevan ideologian pohjalta. Bulgarialainen identiteetti on eräänlainen siirtymäidentiteetti ja “puoli-identiteetti”, jonka keskeneräisyys johtuu toisaalta sen muodostumiseen vaikuttaneista historian tapahtumista, mutta toisaalta myös vanhentuneeseen olemusajatteluun kulttuurin suhteen. Tutkimuksen lopputulema on, että bulgarialaisen kulttuuri-identiteetin suurin haaste on inkluusio ja olemusajattelusta irtautuminen.

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Daria Pritup, April 2017
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"Аз съм българче свободно
над закона аз живея
всичко българско и родно
ще продам, ако успея!

Аз съм българче и расна
в дни на преход, в мътно време
син съм на земя прекрасна
хайде да я окрадеме!"
Chergar, Nov 27, 2009.[1]

1 Introduction

In this research paper I will analyse four seasons of a popular Bulgarian television series *Стъклен дом* (Staklen dom, Eng. *Glass Home*, BTV), produced between 2010 and 2012, in the context of internal (cultural) identity formation and external identity designation. The broad framework of my research was built on theory that, firstly, claims that the region and cultural area of the Balkans (Southeast Europe) has been assigned a subordinate status to the "civilised west" (the culturally, economically and politically dominant regions of Western Europe), yet simultaneously has been positioned against an Oriental Other. In this respect, "the Balkans" as a designation has been differentiated from "the Orient", as it is neither here nor there. Furthermore, within this theoretical frame, the Balkans have succumbed to western hegemony without being invaded, and the unfavourable designation of Balkanism has penetrated self-identification processes in the region; in other words, the Balkans are "self-colonised".

I will consider whether the creation of Bulgarian cultural consciousness is based on absence of a civilizational model by analysing the identity representations in a popular Bulgarian television series. The topic of my research touches on relevant issues in the midst of current nationalist and Europe-centric discourse. As nation-

[1] "Аз съм Българче – Аз съм Бойко!" Бъзикилийкс – Истината такава, каквато можеше да бъде!? ~ Или частна теория на НЕвероятностите!, Nov 27, 2009. Accessed Apr 7, 2017. https://neverojatno.wordpress.com/.

states close their borders against the "influx" of "otherness", their arguments are not only political and economic, but based on cultural identification, differentiation and exclusion. I will put Bulgarian cultural identity into a historical context, in order to show its constructed nature, whilst also unearthing the importance of identity construction to Bulgarians. My research questions include, but are not limited to the following: is modern Bulgarian cultural identity, as portrayed in this specific instance of popular culture, measured against "the west"? Is said identity built on the dominant conceptualisation of the Balkans by Western European scholars and media (Balkanism) and its reproduction or reapplication from the inside upon one's self-identification (self-colonisation)? Are the images of Bulgaria and Bulgarians portrayed in *Glass Home* based on absence of civilisation and development? Finally, who and what is "Bulgarian" in the 2010s?

My position as a researcher is similar to Bulgaria's position in Europe: something in between, a bridge, a crossroads. I was born in Sofia eight months before the fall of the Berlin Wall into a family of "stray dogs", as my mother puts it. My father was the offspring of a woman from south-western Bulgaria and a Kuban Cossack refugee, who fought against the Bolsheviks in the beginning of the 1900s and was forced to flee the USSR after their victory. As a ballet dancer and actor, my father toured the Soviet Union – a luxury enjoyed by few citizens at the time. In Leningrad, he met an Ingrian Finn dramaturge, my mother, and she migrated to Bulgaria with him. Originally stemming from Savonia and the Karelian Isthmus, Ingrians had suffered several forced expulsions and evacuations out of Soviet and former Finnish territories in the first half of the 20th century.

The 1990s in Bulgaria brought a terrible economic depression, culminating in a budget deficit and hyperinflation in 1996-1997. Meanwhile in Finland, President Koivisto officially welcomed Ingrians and ethnic Finns to "return" to their homeland in 1992. Thus, on May 4th, 1999, my family and I landed in Helsinki to start a new life as "returnees", i.e. immigrants with Finnish ancestry. Being white, educated, middle class and (after two years) fully Finnish-speaking, I felt like an immigrant but not quite, then like a Finn but not quite. Due to receiving my education in "the west", there are gaps in my understanding of Bulgarian historical,

cultural and societal contexts, which must be taken into account when approaching my research. Nevertheless, I received my secondary and higher education in Finland and in the UK, thus making me part of western cultural domination.

In addition to my personal affiliations with the region, I feel Western European and US media often lumps Bulgaria together with other Slavic nation-states in Central and Eastern Europe under the vague "Balkan" heading. Bulgaria is also somewhat overlooked in Western European research, which mostly focuses on conflicts in the region of former Yugoslavia. Indeed, the first genocide on European soil since the Second World War must be given its due academic attention! However, even though Bulgaria has not been a war zone in almost three quarters of a century, its cultural identity and place within Europe are current and an important focal point of cultural research. The east/west dichotomy in Europe is problematic and possibly destructive, yet simultaneously a source of symbols and (hi)stories for its inhabitants.

This paper is divided into six chapters, a bibliography and includes an appendix. In the next chapter, I will explore the theoretical background and key conceptual framework used in this research, tying it with relevant points of Bulgarian history. In the third chapter, I will outline the political and social context of Bulgaria in the recent decades leading up to the years when *Glass Home* was broadcasted (from the 1980s to the early 2010s). In chapter four, I will account for the previous research on Balkanism and self-colonisation, as well as the series *Glass Home*. Thereafter, I will broadly introduce the data and methodology of my study in chapter five, proceeding in subchapters 5.1-5.5 with in-depth data analysis. Chapter six is dedicated to a concluding discussion, as well as suggestions for further research. The appendix includes all data considered in this study, thematically divided and translated into English by the author for convenience.

2 Unravelling the Balkan Fractal

Бащице, стар Балкан, жестоко съдиш ти!
Вековний грях и срам на нашите бащи…
Pencho Slaveykov (1866-1912)[2]

"There is no other Balkan literature that has dedicated such eulogies to the Balkans as the Bulgarian", Maria Todorova (2009, 54) postulates. The mythologised image of the Balkan mountain range is also uniquely personified, as father or mother – represented by the extract of a poem by Pencho Slaveikov above. When discussing Bulgarian cultural identity, it is thus important to look at the Balkan denominator. In this chapter, I will firstly briefly address the concept of "cultural identity" and introduce the theoretical framework behind my analyses, the main pillars of which are theorems by two Bulgarian scholars: Maria Todorova's (2009) *Balkanism* and Alexander Kiossev's (1999) *self-colonisation*. I will delve further into theory in the subchapters 2.1-2.3, approaching Bulgaria and the Balkans as geospatial concepts, re-presentations, self-colonised cultures and absence-based identities.

Unfortunately, the scope of this paper does not allow me to go deeper into comparing and contrasting the multitude of identity theories. Nevertheless, I have chosen the definition of (cultural) identity as conceptualised by Stuart Hall (1932-2014) due to the connection his theory creates with other theories presented further on. "Cultural identity", in Hall's (1990, 223) terms, is not an essential "one true self" of "people with a shared history and ancestry", but a *positioning* connected to a "place, time, history and culture" (ibid., 225), which is changeable, transformative and discursive. Thus, Hall is concerned with the way cultural hegemony affects the positioning and representation of subordinate cultures. Additionally, Hall's research focus on media representations specifically is useful when examining a

[2] "Balkan, our father Balkan, have eyes of grace. / Harshly dost thou look from the judgment place. / What of our mothers now, of the tears they brought / To blot away the sins which the fathers wrought?" Rendered in English by H. Bernard (1904).

television series as a position of *enunciation* of Bulgarian cultural identity, connecting it to *re-presentation*: it is a product of political motivations, interpretations of history and conscious self-designation. I will expand on these concepts further on.

Turning to the theories used to conceptualise specifically Bulgarian cultural identity, I have examined Balkanism (Todorova 2009), which is a coinage based on postcolonial scholar Edward Said's (1995) Orientalism. Balkanism conceptualises the Balkans as a designation from the west stemming from "imperfect geographical knowledge" coloured with "political, social, cultural, and ideological overtones (…) around World War I", ending with "the complete dissociation of the designation from its object, and the subsequent reverse and retroactive ascription of the ideologically loaded designation to the region, particularly after 1989" (Todorova 2009, 7). Orientalism and Balkanism both deal with identity formation from the outside in, but in slightly different terms. Firstly, the Orient is a refuge from the alienation of industrialisation, a metaphor for the forbidden, feminine, sensual, even sexual, whereas the Balkans, whilst also providing escapism, is not forbidden or sensual – it is male, primitive, crude and dishevelled (Todorova 2009, 14). Secondly, there is a clear historical and geographical concreteness in the Balkan denominator, whilst the Orient is intangible in nature (Bakić-Hayden 1995) – always related to the point from which it is being examined. Thirdly, Orientalism is fundamentally racist, categorising non-white, non-Christian people, whereas Balkanism deals with whites in something not quite non-Europe, not a final dichotomy. Finally, the self-perception of the Balkan peoples is not colonial, but "semicolonial" (Todorova 2009, 17) – Balkan self-identity is itself created "against an oriental 'other'" (ibid., 20). It can also be considered "self-colonising", in other words it has "succumbed to the cultural power of Europe and the west without having been invaded" (Kiossev 2011, 1).

Said (1995, 5-7) claims that the Orient is real as in not imaginary, yet not real as in constructed, shaped by power structures and dominant hegemonic discourse, a distortion, as well as a reflection of the Occident, and vice versa. Todorova (2009, 15) conceptualises the Orient and the west as "antiworlds", two complete and

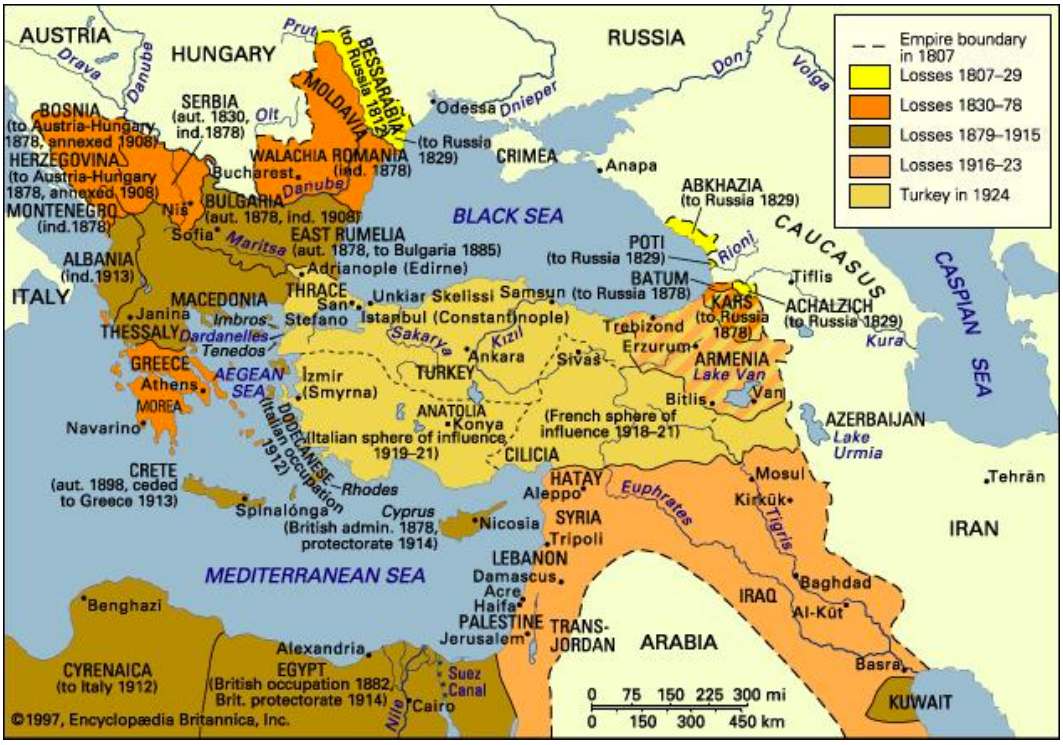
separate entities. The Balkans are perhaps similarly distorted and shaped by western hegemony as the Orient, but they are ambiguous, situated in "the shadow of the Orient" (ibid., 15-16): they neither are or are not. Milica Bakić-Hayden (1995) develops this concept even further by introducing the term "nesting orientalisms" as an attempt to go beyond a simplistic east/west dichotomy and understand that the representations of "east", "orient", or "other" are always multidimensional and hierarchical: some can be perceived as "more eastern" and "more oriental" than others.

Another interesting (anthropological) perspective on the topic is proposed by Sarah F. Green (2005), who applies fractal theory to the concept of Balkanisation and the Balkans, and argues that their state of existence – continuously fragmented, moving and changeable, but also repeating the same patterns (i.e. fractal) – is not inherently so, but conceptualised as such by powerful players. These conceptualisations have subsequently become essentialised and embodied by their subjects due to an imposed cultural hegemony. Once again, the interplay of identity formation from the outside in is what I find most intriguing and would like to study further.

2.1 Geography, Spatiality and Fragmentation

Firstly, I must address the Balkans as a geographical and spatial concept, and how that concept relates to Bulgaria as a nation-state as well as Bulgarian cultural identification. Even if we speak of geography as purely map-making and "objective" classification of natural and urban space in Europe, we are still faced with the multiplicity of the concept. The Balkans are a mountain range situated in northern Bulgaria. The Balkan Peninsula (or Southeast Europe) is roughly speaking the area between the Adriatic and the Black Sea. A quick Google image search produces at least ten different versions of what constitutes Southeast Europe or the Balkans. Bulgaria specifically is an interesting case, because geographically it is located within the area between the Adriatic and the Black Sea (and is the only country the Balkan mountain range runs through), but geopolitically it would in fact often be left outside the concept of the Balkans. Like the rest of Southeast European nations, Bulgarians were not colonised by Western European empires, and like most of them, they were conquered by the Ottoman Empire for several centuries

between the 1300s and the 1800s. The geopolitical terms "Balkan powder-keg" or "Balkanisation" were coined in the 19th and 20th centuries to portray the unstable situation in the Balkan Peninsula before and after the First World War, but since have been used to denote overlapping claims to territory, fragmentation and division in general[3]. In the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, Bulgaria was undisputedly a key player, attempting to invade even its own allies. Yet the most recent development that has contributed to the Balkanist rhetoric is the Bosnian War of 1992-95 and, more generally, the dissolution of Yugoslavia – both events that Bulgaria played no part in.



Map 1: The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, 1807-1924. Source: http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_nm.php?ModuleId=10008187&MediaId=8842.

[3] For example, Balkanisation of Syria (http://geopoliticsrst.blogspot.fi/2015/10/balkanization-of-syria-only-solution.html), Spain (http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/ideas/2012/09/fiscal-crisis-and-the-balkanization-of-spain-which-way-forward/) or Nigeria (http://africasacountry.com/2014/05/historyclass-with-cheta-the-balkanization-of-nigeria/).

In order to delve deeper into geospatiality, I turn to geographer Doreen Massey, who deals with spatiality as a kind of (to use Todorova's term) "antiworld" to temporality. In her interview with *Social Science Bites*[4], Massey argues that space has often been conceptualised as a "flat surface" lacking "dynamism", which in her view misrepresents space as less important than (and even separated from) time. Massey (2005, 9) characterises space as "a product of interrelations", "the sphere of coexisting multiplicity [and] heterogeneity", and something which is "never finished" and "always under construction" due to the aforementioned relations. She also theorises on "the contemporaneous existence of a plurality of trajectories" and the "simultaneity of stories-so-far" (ibid., 12). Identities, for Massey, are entities, which interact in spatiality whilst simultaneously being a part of it. Thus, "space is the dimension that presents us with the existence of the other" (ibid.) – in other words, several entities/identities can occupy and encapsulate the same space. The European space, especially since the establishment of the European Union, has presented us with such a picture: from hopeful wannabe-member-states deemed not good enough to enter the elite membership club (e.g. Turkey or Macedonia) to existing members causing societal outrage with their "uncivilised" politics and economics (e.g. Greece and Spain), to othering from even deeper within, such as independence aspirations (Catalonia, Flanders, Scotland) on one end and self-colonisation on the other[5] (Balkans). Finally, the othering gaze is also turned on oneself and differences are deemed insurmountable (Brexit). The effects of the *fictiõ* of "European culture" must also be examined in relation to Bulgarian cultural self-identification.

[4] "Doreen Massey on Space." Social Science Bites, N. Warburton and D. Edmonds. Published Feb 1, 2013. Accessed Nov 21, 2015. http://www.socialsciencespace.com/2013/02/podcastdoreen-massey-on-space/.
[5] I would argue that the self-image of Catalans, Scots and Flemish is very much based on "presences" of civilisation (history, culture, heritage, political and/or economic factors, etc.), if not Europeanness.

The Balkan space, according to Green (2005, 129), usually symbolises fragmentation as well as "a bridge or a crossroads" between interlocated, interacting spaces that "contain too many differences that are too close and too mixed up together." Green (ibid.) counters these postulations by pointing out that "fragments create gaps, and gaps constitute relations between things (rather than being empty space that separates things)", which means that the Balkans are in fact comprised of "too much connection". Their fragmentation is emphasised within a hegemonic discourse which "combines how things seem with how things are", reality and perception. Similarly, Kiossev (2003, 1) argues, that the "geographic metonym" of the Balkans "presupposes the existence of a nongeographical referent". Space – and thus identity, which is part of it – connotes interconnectedness as well as symbolism: something more intricate than a simple list of qualities, on which the collective cultural identity can be based on.

Let us begin addressing the aforementioned characterisations of space in relation to Bulgaria. Firstly, as part of Southeast Europe it has been distinguished from the Orient and the Occident due to differing geopolitics, religion and self-identification.

> *"Geographically inextricable from Europe, yet culturally constructed as "the other", the Balkans (...) have served as a repository of negative characteristic against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the "European" and "the west" has been constructed." (Todorova 1994, 455)*

In other words, the interrelations between Europe or "the west" and the Balkans have produced essentialised notions of what the Balkans are conceptually, combining them with the multiplicity and mutability of what they are in actuality. These notions have aided the construction of national identities in Western Europe, but, as I will discuss further on, they have also created the Balkan self-identification based on otherness, inferiority and absence.

In relation to Massey's "trajectories", we might discuss historical trauma and myths regarding Ottoman rule, and the subsequent nationalistic tendencies of the Bulgarian government, who pushed forward such political endeavours as the

Assimilation Policy (1956-1989) of the Bulgarian Muslim population, the aim of which was to erase Turkish and promote Slavic heritage. Alternatively, we might consider the role of and the relation to Russians, which in Bulgarian history has been tied to geospatiality: Russians supported Bulgarian independence from the Ottoman Empire, but after the Balkan Wars Russia disputed Bulgaria's right to certain areas of land. Finally, we might also discuss the formation of Bulgarian national identity in relation to the Bulgarian Empires (between 7th and 14th century) compared with the relatively small nation-state of today. All of these trajectories are quite different, yet simultaneously occupying the same territory, where people "recognise their shared characteristics and stable belonging" (Kiossev 2003, 7).

2.2 Thick Description and Fictiõ/Re-Presentation

Furthermore, after dealing with the geographical concept of the Balkans, I must try to engage with its culture. Said (1978, 21) writes that written text cannot provide us with "a delivered presence", but simply "a re-presence, or a representation", which causes the displacement of the "real thing", the object it conceptualises (such as the Orient). In other words, even though the Orient should be attributed physical existence, the concept that denominates it should not, as it is a construction – and a hegemonic one at that. Once again, we can see the combination of reality and perception. Similarly, according to Geertz, culture should be studied with the premise that it is a *fictiõ*, a making, a construction, and so are all the interpretations conjured of it. Whether or not this fiction is or is not a representation of something physically real, Geertz (1973, 10) argues, does not matter: "once human behaviour is seen as (…) symbolic action (…) the question as to whether culture is patterned conduct or a frame of mind (…) loses sense."

Geertz does not intend to say that culture is a meaningless subject for academic study, but a subject requiring what Gilbert Ryle has termed as *thick description*: a researcher needs to be aware of the multiplicity of his or her subject and proceed to analyse this multiplicity accordingly, as "winks upon winks upon winks." (Ibid., 9) (Green (2005) also uses the metaphor of "bumps upon bumps upon bumps" to describe usual representation of the Balkans as being literally mountainous, but also

violent, unstable, uneven. Additionally, the "bumps" describe well the collision of dichotomies in Balkanist/Orientalist discourse.) According to Geertz (1973, 12), when looking at an instance of one person winking to another, everything around the technical description of the physical motion of closing and opening an eyelid would be viable data for inspection from the perspective of cultural studies.

However, the representation of cultures through the eyes of well-meaning scholars does not always "render them accessible" and "dissolve their opacity" (ibid., 14), as Geertz postulates. Anthropological studies have indeed brought diverse cultures to the fore, in other words "made the strange familiar", yet there is also a fair amount of exotification, fetishisation and stereotyping that has followed ethnographic studies. Geertz (ibid., 15) does acknowledge that "in the study of culture, analysis penetrates into the very body of the object". In other words, even if one does not engage in mimicry, the results of one's research may still have essentialising effects on the object of study, because the two are intertwined. In this case, opacity may return, just like it has for the Balkans as the object of study for western travellers and scholars. This is an important issue in relation to the positioning of the researcher. Having lived for almost twenty years in Finland, I could be criticised for an attempt to speak for "my people", whilst in actuality being just as much part of the oppressive machinery I criticise (middle-class, educated, part of the capitalist machinery, and writing in indecipherable, academic jargon). I must make it clear that I am speaking as a Bulgarian, but also as a "westernised" academic, whose own "bumps" inevitably affect the representations of Bulgarian cultural identity in this paper.

Yet, turning back to thick description (as well as trajectories), the "bumps" of the Balkans multiply with the concept of Balkanism. If we take on Green's approach not to succumb to notions of meaninglessness (she criticises Slavoj Žižek's (1997) metaphorical suggestion to "turn off the sound of a TV" when attempting to discuss the Yugoslav Wars in order to see that clarity simply cannot be achieved in cultural analysis), but instead to embrace all scales of inspecting the fragments or their constitutive whole – "to switch the sound off and switch it back on again repeatedly" (Green 2005, 141) – we might find ourselves entangled in webs of

significance attached to Balkanism. For instance, in addition to the geographical location discussed in the previous chapter, the ever-persisting east/west dichotomy may refer to levels of democracy or economic and technological progress, religious affiliation (Orthodox or Muslim versus Catholic or Protestant), political affiliation (communism versus capitalism), colonial relations, and premodernity or history versus (post)modernity. However, since Said's Orientalism is built on the binary opposition of east and west, it perhaps creates an "either or" simplification: people can be either modern or backward, either colonised or colonisers. If one is not clearly one or the other (as any deeper study of the Balkans inevitably shows they are), then one's fractality might be interpreted as meaningless. The relationships between the fragments (as parts of the whole and also equal to the whole) provides fertile soil for alternative interpretations without loss of meaning.

2.3 Colonisation, Self-Colonisation and The Absence

In relation to Bulgaria, colonisation is a very complicated topic. Bulgarian literature from the Bulgarian National Revival (1760s to 1870s) is abundant with atrocity myths about the Ottoman "yoke."[6] The creation of the Bulgarian national spirit as well as anti-Ottoman sentiment was essential, as this period was leading up to the Russo-Turkish War in 1877-1878, ending in Bulgaria's independence. According to research in recent decades, life under Ottoman rule was much less oppressive than these myths portray it to have been (Eminov 1997). Todorova (2009, 195) also claims that the Ottoman Empire should not be approached as a coloniser. She outlines the most important differences between the Balkans compared to English or French colonies, namely a) the dependencies were not differentiated institutionally or legally from the metropolis; b) the Ottomans did not aim to "civilise"; c) there was no comparable linguistic or cultural hegemony; and most importantly, d) the self-perception of contemporaries was not one of colonised peoples. Nonetheless, the Turk/Ottoman, speaker of Turkish, or Muslim remained

[6] Examples include Paisius the Hilendar, 1762, *Славянобългарска история* [History of Bulgarian Slavs]; Raiko Zhinzifov, 1870, *Кървава кошуля* [Bloody Shirt]; Ivan Vazov, 1894, *Under the Yoke*; and others.

the Other in official political and media discourse until the end of the Assimilation Policy a generation ago.

Partially leaning on Todorova's theory, Alexander Kiossev (2001, 1) theorises on what he terms *self-colonisation* as resulting in "hegemony without domination" – in other words a situation in which a stronger cultural power conquers a weaker one without military colonisation, but by creating a discourse in which the centre, the coloniser itself, is the reference point. The self-colonisation of "insufficient" cultures means yielding to the cultural dominance of and adopting "alien values and civilizational models" (Kiossev 1999, 2) from the centre. In the Balkan context, the "European" centre creates the "common cultural currency" (Gelner 1983, in Kiossev 2011, 4), i.e. the notions through which we observe and interpret ourselves and the world around us as "Europeans", and the Balkans are attributed the role of the "ambivalent, shameful, and comic internal other" (Todorova 2009, 17), the self-image of the Balkans is constructed on the "absence" of Europeanness and civilisation:

> *"Europe was both the subject of criticism and a civilizational superego: for the self-colonising imagination it was not only a primary character on the world scene, it was this scene itself, the recognition-granting gaze." (Kiossev 2011, 6)*

Kiossev (1999, 3) argues that the origin myths of all societies have a connecting factor: the traumatic experience of being abandoned by their Creator, "a certain great Absence", which is also the absence within the Occidental self preventing it from being complete. Self-colonising cultures appropriate the Absence as the basis of self-identification and within the order of modernity, "the west" or "Europe" becomes their Great Other – a "secular transcendence" (Kiossev 2003, 16). The civilizational models and values adopted from the Great Other remain distant and alien to self-colonising cultures, yet still points of aspiration. The shame of self-colonising cultures is a reflection of the shame felt by the Great Other toward those aspects of self-colonising cultures that are present within the Great Other as well.

Thus, the centre reassigns some of its own shame to the periphery in order to reassert its own selfhood.

What happened to self-colonising cultures, according to Kiossev (1999, 5), is that they had to reinvent their national self-consciousness, which had been created on "the alien European model of the educated and emancipated Nation". The symbolic economy produced by the order of modernity required the self-colonising cultures to reconstruct a historical narrative of their nationhood, within which the traumatic point of their birth would become an insignificant, small speck in the larger narrative of their selfhood. They had to create a National Revival.

> *All this is meant to self-convince such a culture that its own historical time has not started at the traumatic point but has been continuous from some honourable Past towards the glorious Future of the Nation. (Kiossev 1999, 6)*

The great Absence of self-colonising cultures is total, structural, and traumatic (Kiossev 1999, 1). We might discuss this absence of civilisation in relation to the different sources of patriotism/nationalism for Western Europe and Bulgaria during their respective National Revivals. "The lack of cultural institutions, literary or scientific achievements, good manners or great Bulgarian poets", writes Kiossev (1999, 1), were an object of complaint for the Bulgarian press at the time. In other words, the western model of patriotism was applied to a "transitory character" and an experience of inferiority, which resulted in "an incomplete self" (Kiossev 2009, 18). Thus, the Absences needed to become Presences: sources of pride were dug out from ancient history, but the failings (the perceived or comparative fraudulence, upstartism, ignorance and vulgarity) of the culture could never be bypassed, as the point of reference always remained the ideal, the developed "Europe". The product of this contradictory state of existence and identification is, perhaps, what Michael Herzfeld (2005, 3) terms "cultural intimacy", i.e. the acknowledgement of embarrassing or shameful aspects of a shared identity, as viewed from an external perspective.

In the words of Reinhart Koselleck (1985, 267), "there is no history which could be constituted independently of the experiences and expectations of active human agents." In light of this, what does a TV series character really want to express by saying that "Bulgaria is a third world country"? In order to attempt to answer that and other questions, I must start with the assumption of Mikhail Bakhtin that speech (and, I could add, text in general) does not happen in a vacuum. I must also take into account that, in addition to personal meanings, people articulate (deconstruct and reconstruct) and negotiate their identities within a society, a culture, and are affected by power relations. I must contextualise the texts produced by people, in other words employ a "relational" as well as "integrative" strategy to "relating elements or parts to each other and thereby to some explicit or implied whole", explaining "the parts and the whole simultaneously" (Berkhofer 1995, 33). In other words, I must analyse the relationships between fragments and look for the trajectories and simultaneous stories. I must acknowledge the re-presentation or the *fictiõ* of texts without casting them aside as being inauthentic due to their constructed nature. Finally, I must recognise the bumps upon bumps in any text, dig deeper for thick description, in order to potentially discover a part of the common cultural identity of Bulgarians today.

3 The Transition Period and Beyond

Having addressed some of Bulgaria's distant history in chapter 2, up to fourteen centuries ago, I would now like to focus on the developments during the last 37 years, which shed a light on many issues addressed in the data analysis. Whilst Balkanism is a product of *longue durée* historical processes, the data of this research shows that political and economic developments of recent decades should not be overlooked either. The painful transition from socialism to democracy and capitalist economy of the 1990s is the major factor in the uncertain status of Bulgarian cultural identity today, thus I will explore its effects on Bulgarian society in this chapter.

In the 1980s, after 43 years of unchallenged rule, the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) began to lose serious ground. The catalyst was the Turkish minority in

Bulgaria: after decades of oppression and forced Slavicisation, they were becoming increasingly dissatisfied. The government's Revival Process (Възродителен процес / Vazroditelen protses) in the 1970s to 1990s, aimed at assimilating Muslims and ethnic Turks, was enforced by way of "the largest military operation undertaken by the Bulgarian army since the end of the second world war" (Crampton 2005, 205), and was internationally denounced. Following BCP First Secretary Todor Zhivkov's Bulgarian *perestroika,* the intelligentsia launched a revolt in 1989. Zhivkov publicly urged Turkey to open its borders to any ethnic Turks wishing to emigrate from Bulgaria, but BCP's official stance expressed certainty that Bulgarian Muslims would remain loyal to the Bulgarian nation (ibid.). In less than three months, however, 310-360 000 ethnic Turks left and 40-152 000 returned,[7] before Turkey closed its borders, unable to cope with the large number of migrants. Ironically called "the Great Excursion", the mass migration of ethnic Turks was propagated as voluntary by the BCP. In reality, it was the culmination point of long-term discrimination, and the last straw that led to Zhivkov's resignation in that same year.

What followed was a chaotic battle for power between newly formed and old reformed (or simply renamed) political organisations. As Bulgaria entered the transition period, protests, demonstrations and hunger strikes became the status quo. During the last decade of the 20th century, Bulgaria saw nine governments, six prime ministers and three presidents. "The economy was to be restructured on the basis of privatisation, decentralisation, and demonopolisation." (Crampton 2010, 214) The dissolution of economic connections (Comecon), adding to the accumulated foreign debt ($12 billion), low quality of manufactured goods, low food production levels and disastrous sanctions, led to the need for economic assistance from the US and Europe. It was also becoming apparent that conglomerates owned by former BCP members had greatly skewed the Bulgarian

[7] Sources vary on the numbers. For estimations, please see Crampton 2005, 210; Maeva 2006, 49; Marinov 2010; Yakar, 2013.

economy in their favour, directly contributing to the budget deficit. By the end of 1996, the annual inflation rate was 578.6 per cent (ibid., 234).

Ivan Kostov's centre-right government (1997-2001) stabilised the economy with the glow of NATO and EU memberships on the horizon. Kostov initiated harsh economic reforms, many of which did not pay off for Bulgaria as expected. For a while, things were looking up: between 1997 and 1999, the inflation rate dropped from 242.7 to 1.7 per cent. However, the decline resumed after 1999 and Bulgarians suffered from the severe economic measures. Unemployment, the prolific black economy, political corruption and criminality, now more difficult to hide from the free press, angered Bulgarians and weakened the government's image.

In 2001, the successor to Kostov's government, the National Movement Simeon II (NMSS) came into power. Prime Minister Simeon "Sakskoburggotski", a former Bulgarian king in exile, liberalised the energy market, increased social welfare and took significant steps in the battle against corruption. Additionally, after more pressure from the EU, the NMSS proceeded to curtail the judiciary, further Roma inclusion, achieve GDP growth as well as turn inflation into decline. These developments finally paved the road to "serious accession negotiations" (ibid., 252) with the EU in 2002, and it was not long before NATO followed suit. However, the austere measures also cost the NMSS their popularity among the population.

In the 2005 elections, anti-NATOist Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP, former BCP) formed a three-party coalition cabinet with the NMSS and the social liberal Movement for Rights and Freedoms (supported by ethnic Turks, Pomaks, Muslims and Roma). Their cooperation as "the Stanishev government" was difficult, but needed in order to complete the EU accession process in 2007. However, the demands on Bulgaria continued: a European Commission report published in 2008 emphasised the unsatisfactory progress in the areas of anti-corruption as well as law enforcement and judiciary reform and subsequently the EU froze subsidies to

Bulgaria.[8] The year was marred also by Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev's complete denial of the on-going financial crisis at the time,[9] which his government failed to keep in check. Dissatisfaction with politics at home have been abundant among the Bulgarian population throughout the transition period, culminating in the ten-month long protests in 2013-2014, where people were "protesting just to change something".[10]

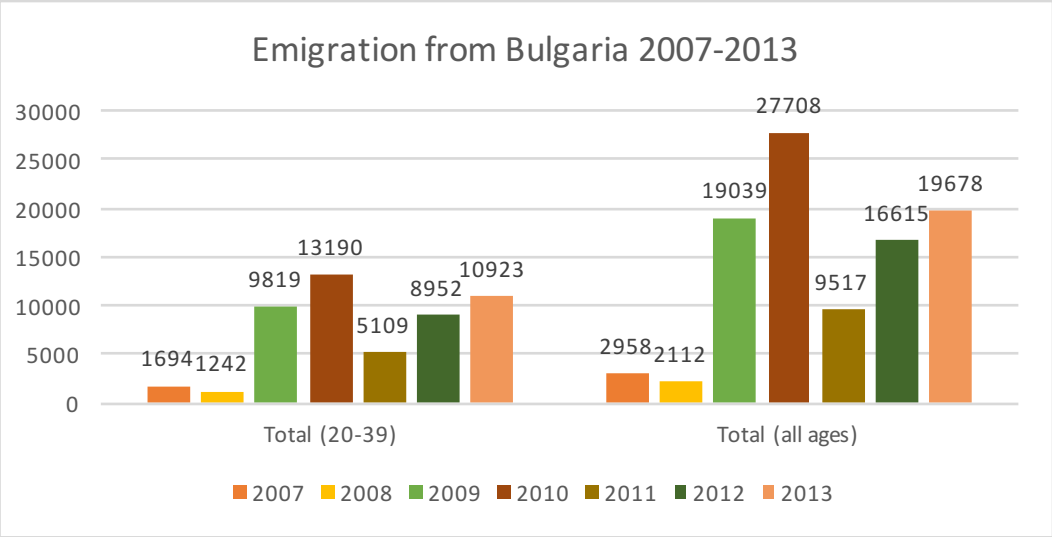


Figure 1: Emigration from Bulgaria 2007-2013. Data: The National Statistical Institute, Bulgaria. https://infostat.nsi.bg/infostat/pages/external/login.jsf.

High unemployment rates continued well into the noughties: in 2003, overall unemployment was 18.1 per cent and unemployment among under-25s was 35.6 per cent (Crampton 2010, 257). Disillusioned, educated (and often young) adults were emigrating *en masse* throughout the transition period and beyond. Including the second wave of migration to Turkey (1990-1997), Crampton (ibid.) estimates

[8] "EU suspends funding for Bulgaria." *BBC News*, Jul 23, 2008. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7520736.stm.
[9] "Стабилни сме, готови сме за всичко, криза няма." *News.bg*, Oct 9, 2008. Accessed Mar 28, 2017. https://news.bg/politics/stabilni-sme-gotovi-sme-za-vsichko-kriza-nyama.html.
[10] "Hundreds gather to mark 300th day of Bulgarian protest." *Euroviews*, Apr 11, 2014. Accessed Mar 28, 2017. http://www.euroviews.eu/2014/2014/04/11/hundreds-gather-to-mark-300th-day-of-bulgarian-protest/.

that Bulgaria lost around 700,000 people to migration since 1989. Being members of the EU has increased the flow of migration both ways, but emigration numbers are comparatively staggering. Between 2007 and 2013, almost 100 000 have migrated from Bulgaria, 52% of them aged 20-39. In the span of 27 years since the 1990s, the total Bulgarian population has diminished by 1.8 million, due to migration and low birth rates. (Worldometers 2017)

4 Previous Research

There is plenty of research on Balkanist/Orientalist themes in such pieces of popular culture as the James Bond films and Tin Tin, but such works are produced by western scholars for a western audience, which is why I argue they are not as representative of Balkan identity-from-within as cultural products created with a local audience in mind. "westernization" and the influx of North American cultural products has been powerful in Bulgaria since 1989, yet the Bulgarian population has remained loyal to *telenovelas*[11] and Turkish soap operas. In the 1990s, cult American soap operas such as *Dallas* (1978-1991, CBS), *The Bold and the Beautiful* (1987-present, CBS) and *Baywatch* (1989-2011, NBC) were showcased in Bulgaria for the first time. *Glass Home* sits well within the soap opera tradition, in which dramatic storylines with emphasis on emotional relationships are created in a setting that can be either elite or working class, but often the combination (and opposition) of both.

There is also plenty of research that refers to Kiossev and Todorova on topics such as the role of Balkanism in Bulgarian EU-accession discourse (Curticapean 2008), the relationship between nationalism and spatiality in Hungary (Zombory 2012), and Slovak identity negotiation within and via cinema (Dudková 2013). The framework of self-colonisation in particular takes inspiration from Postcolonial Studies, and is specifically used in works conceptualising the relationship between

[11] A television drama series produced in Central or Latin America and exported to the United States, Europe or Asia. The *telenovela* differs from the soap opera by its usually limited run.

the Balkans and the EU. These works include, but are not limited to topics, such as the branding of Bulgaria under EU accession (Kaneva 2007), the center/periphery framework in EU accession (Obad 2008), and post-socialist art and culture in Bulgaria (Ranova 2010). In general, both Balkanism and self-colonisation are popular among researchers from Eastern and Southeast Europe, which points to a discussion being had from within, as well as from without. Nonetheless, it must be underlined that both Kiossev and Todorova as well as many other researchers from the Balkan area using the Balkanist framework have been educated outside of the Balkans (for example, the States, Western Europe or the United Kingdom), which inevitably positions them on the crossroads of Balkanism.

Research on *Glass Home* specifically is scarce. There are a few papers written on product placement in the series (Kadiyska 2015, Teodora Doncheva 2012), a narrative structure analysis (Gueorguieva 2014) and at least one critical film studies piece (Draganov 2010) – some of which I will reference in the data analysis. In spite of that, the series has indeed been a big hit in Bulgaria and been exported also to Turkey, Russia and Greece, which speaks for a certain common Balkan narrative. Almost one million viewers saw the final episode of *Glass Home*,[12] and a work of such popularity, I am inclined to deduce, resonates deeply with viewers, and thus I believe it to be an interesting subject for academic study, which fills an important research gap. *Glass Home*, as a product of popular culture, fits into the second of three categories expanded by Storey (2001, 169-170): "the authorized utterance in search of as large audience as possible", in other words mass cultural products in film, television or advertising. It thus does not represent the voice of the oppressed, but is still accessible by most, unlike *Hochkultur*. However, any researcher's gaze will inevitably be one coming from an elite position, so a balance must be struck

[12] "Финалът на "Стъклен дом" събра 1 милион зрители пред ТВ екрана." [The finale of *Glass Home* gathered one million viewers in front of the TV screen.] *BTV Ratings*, Jun 12, 2012. Accessed November 21, 2015. http://www.btv.bg/article/ratings/finalat-na-staklen-dom-sabra-1-milion-zriteli-pred-tv-ekrana.html

between the imaginations of some and the articulations of those imaginations by others. I will attempt to strike this balance in my analysis ahead.

5 Data Overview and Methodology

The research data consists of four seasons of the television series *Glass Home* (2010–2012) – a total of roughly 65 hours of video footage. I have excluded the fifth and final season from my data due to the limited scope of my thesis, but it could prove fertile ground for further research. I have analysed the series through the chosen theoretical framework, as well as transcribed and translated parts of the dialogue relevant to my study. In addition to inserting the dialogue into my analysis below, I have compiled them under eight themes into an appendix to my thesis (Appendix 1). Some of the themes were developed in the planning stage, parallel to the preliminary hypothesis of this research (1-4, 7), and others were extracted directly from the data (5-6, 8). Much of the data falls into two or more of these themes. The themes are as follows:

1. Bulgaria, its capital and the Balkans as **geospatial locations**;
2. Bulgarians as a **nation, group, community** or any community assuming a collective cultural identity (for example women, mothers, the elite, et cetera) in Bulgaria, including Bulgarian ethnic minorities;
3. Bulgarian or Balkan **cultural products and symbols** in the spheres of music, cuisine, sport, as well as landmarks;
4. references to **Balkanist and Orientalist discourse** in relation to Bulgaria and its people (including backwardness, fraudulence, barbarism, mysticism, lack of civilisation, criminality, reliance on personal connections, lack of economic development, corruption, ignorance, et cetera), as well as elevation of the image of the "developed west";
5. references to **timelessness** and frozenness of the shared cultural space, where nothing happens or changes, everything repeats itself, and everything has always been as it is now;
6. references to **spaces in-between**, contradictory or transitional state, figurative bridges or cross-roads of space and identity;

7. the transformative nature of the **migrant experience**, as well as othering and differentiation of the migrant;
8. differentiation and **othering** of ethnic minorities, such as the Roma, and the so-called "villagers".

In the following chapters, I plan to explore the construct of modern Bulgarian cultural identity through the lens of *Glass Home* and, specifically, by examining this identity's relation to the concepts of Balkanism and self-colonisation. These concepts are the pillars of my research and I will address them continuously throughout the paper, even though I have separated all instances of data referring to them under one theme – this I have done mostly for clarity. In the first subchapter (5.1), the reader may find some general observations about the series, its production and connections between this fictional world and Bulgarian reality. Further, I will outline the representations of Bulgaria and its inhabitants (5.2), as well as discuss cultural symbols and what makes a "true Bulgarian", according to the series. Then, I will turn to two markers of internal otherness: ethnic minority (5.3) and migratory experience (5.4). Finally, I will separately examine the bridge/crossroads metaphor as well as references to the timelessness of the region (5.5), before concluding with a discussion chapter (6).

5.1 Glass Home and Premise of the Research

The events of *Glass Home* transpire for the most part in or around M-Center, a commercial shopping mall modelled after the Mall of Sofia in the Bulgarian capital (used also as the filming set of the series). The title of the series alludes not only to the modern, glassy structure of a shopping mall (a symbol of prosperity in itself), but also to "the fragility of human relationships and of the instability of the family institution in a world of individualization and consumerism" (Gueorguieva 2014, 97). The series presents the fictional life of powerful and wealthy Bulgarians. Thus, *Glass Home*, in addition to being a commentary on Bulgarian society and culture, deals with social class and, due to its creators' background in advertising, is very focused on visual representations of luxury. Some of the main characters are business shareholders and some work as hairdressers, drivers, security guards, and bartenders, but hardly any of them can be considered poor by appearance. Members

of the lower classes communicate some criticism of overt extravagance during the first seasons of the series, yet the myriad of high-end furniture and clothing, ritzy hotels and restaurants, lavish apartments, and product placement of credit cards loudly eulogise luxury and capitalism. Prominent Sofians, entertainers and criminals are owners of the apartments and hotels used as filming sets of *Glass Home*, which creates a stark impression that criminal activities and corruption are acceptable and even rewarded.

Photo 2: Mall of Sofia. Source: www.mallofsofia.bg.

The events of the first episode of the first season transpire at a birthday party for M-Center leading partner, Dimitar Kasabov, organised by his young wife Boryana. Dimitar's prodigal son, Kamen, returns after 18 years of absence to offer his forgiveness to his father. Kamen had left his family home because of Dimitar's heavy alcoholism and abuse, which Kamen felt was a crucial factor in his mother's suicide. The two men barely have a chance to greet each other outside of the location of the party, when an assassin fires his weapon into Dimitar's back. The following episodes deal with the aftermath of Dimitar's death and Kamen's entrance into the lives of his father's second wife and son as well as the partners and colleagues at the M-Center.

Further on, I will present numerous examples of Balkanist discourse and imagery used in the series as tools for conceptualising the Bulgarian society and self. *Glass Home* reveals the discrepancies between such simplistic dichotomies as east/west or civilisation/backwardness, but also the dichotomies' importance in the representations of Bulgarian identities. The data shows that firstly, Bulgarian identity and cultural belonging cannot be separated from socio-economic issues due

to the severe effects of such issues on spaces and population (chapter 5.2); secondly, Bulgarian self-identification is still based on othering instead of inclusion, and the representations of Bulgarian identities are still lacking in ethnic diversity (chapter 5.3); thirdly, Bulgarian self-identification is based on a literal absence – migration (chapter 5.4); and finally, the Bulgarian self-identification is simultaneously transitional and stagnating (chapter 5.5).

5.2 "Father Balkan" and Other Narratives of Cultural Belonging

"Балканът за България

закрилник е, баща!"[13]

Stoyan Drinov (1883-1922)

Firstly, in this chapter, I would like to return briefly to Todorova's (2009) claim that Bulgarians are the only Balkan peoples, who eulogise the Balkans. Serbian ethnologist and anthropologist Ivan Čolović (2013, under "The Balkans as a Promised Land") brings this claim into question: he presents several literary examples by Serbian and Croatian authors, which employ the image of the Balkans as a poetic symbol of cultural and geospatial belonging. The examples are from the 1980s and 1990s, hence the author's argument that they "can be taken as signs of change" (ibid.) in the use of the Balkan denominator. Yet Čolović extends his analysis to show that this change is not a completely new phenomenon. It is part of a general "exotification" of the Balkans, which was present already in the same travel literature Todorova (2009) had examined (and which was the basis of her theory of Western European discrimination against the Balkans) (Čolović 2013).

Whether the Bulgarians were the only ones or not, eulogise they did, but *Glass Home* does not reflect the eulogies in the slightest. The natural beauty of the Balkan mountain range has little to do with the city dwellers of Sofia, especially the *crème-de-la-crème* of society represented by the main characters of the series. The only mention of the Balkans is in the form of a subtle belittling of former M-Center

[13] "The Balkan, for Bulgaria, is a protector and a father."

partners Elena and Hristo Atanasov, who establish a new advertising company in the fourth season of *Glass Home*. Business does not go well for them, which reflects also in the way Elena attempts to gloss over their failings by elevating their company's status to "the best in the Balkans".

> **Elena:** I am Elena Atanasova, owner of In Flame – the most creative advertising agency in the Balkans.

In the context in which Elena expresses this sentiment, it is difficult to see it as fully affirmative, because it is based on deception. The "best in the Balkans" tag appears ostensibly grandiose yet simultaneously contradictory in its irony, which is obvious to the omniscient viewer. In other words, the viewer understands that whilst being the best in the Balkans sounds like a grand feat, it is in fact a phrase used to mask something rotten. Combined with the instances in the data where Bulgaria is described as a "third world" or otherwise criticised for its many failings, as well as the lack of Balkan presence in the series (discussed further on), Elena's evaluation of her business has a ring of shame to it.

In spite of the mall's international agenda, Balkan ethnicities are scarce in the data, represented solely by Serbian border patrol officers in the second season. They appear in Kamen's retelling of how he left Bulgaria 18 years ago to Boryana. The story is as follows: a powerful leader of the Bulgarian mafia, Metodi Ganev, arranges counterfeit identification documents for Kamen in return for his help in smuggling a truckload of Bulgarian vodka to Italy. Unbeknownst to Kamen, the boxes of vodka at the back of his truck hide from view a dozen drugged Bulgarian young female victims of trafficking. At the border with Serbia, two officers check Kamen's identification and cargo, clearly suspecting foul play, but deliberately overlook the signs and confiscate a box of vodka as a souvenir. The officers are two-dimensional characters with very few simple lines, and their portrayal hits the marks on Balkanism: backward, corrupt, simple-minded, and linguistically challenged. Officer 1 connects Kamen's fake, British identity to the Beatles, but Officer 2 (who speaks even less English than Officer 1) strongly prefers former Yugoslav pop-folk star, Lepa Brena. Officer 1, being the more "internationalised"

of the pair, is visibly embarrassed by his partner's "vulgar" taste in music, but his own "sophistication" is also lacking, measured against the western standard.

> **Officer 1:** *[in English]* Paul Griffin. Paul McCartney. Beatles, huh?
>
> **Kamen:** *[in English]* Yeah! Beatles!
>
> **Officer 1:** *[sings]* Let it be, let it be…
>
> **Officer 2:** *[in Serbian]* What Beatles? Lepa Brena! *[sings]* Chik, chik, chik, pogodi…
>
> *[Officer 1 interrupts him with annoyed look.]*

This singular portrayal of Serbs in the data does not seem to connect the two nations under a Balkan identification; in fact, it may even attempt to diverge both nations from it. My argument is based on Officer 2's choice of music. *Chalga*, also called "pop-folk" or "turbo-folk", is a music genre popular in the Balkans combining folk and "oriental" music elements with electronic dance music. It is essentially mixed music (Statelova and Rodel 2005), and thus does not fit into a "pure" and "singular" concept of culture – therefore, *chalga* is strongly associated with ethnic minorities in Bulgaria, such as Turks and Roma (Apostolov 2008). It is the most controversial music genre of the Balkans, evoking feelings of both love and hate even among young people (ibid.), and it is definitely not a genre associated with the intelligentsia. In fact, *chalga* could be perceived as the *telenovela* of music, as it has "aimed to establish the cult of crime and violence, war-profiteering, national-chauvinism and provincialism" (Milivojević 2004). On the other hand, the genre's populism and mixed nature have the potential to blur ethnic and cultural borders, albeit it has currently failed to do so due to the burdens of Balkanism and Orientalism (Apostolov 2008, 92).

Considering the traditional folk elements of the music, which are audible to Bulgarians, attitudes toward *chalga* represent the Balkanist struggle: on one hand, Bulgarians want to acknowledge and preserve the old, traditional culture of the Balkans, also as a basis of nationalism and cultural self-identification, but on the other hand, the core aspects of such a culture are rejected for their antiquity, stagnation, and vulgarity (compared to many aspects of "western" cultural

tradition). While *chalga* incorporates modern elements, it also celebrates the Balkans as separate from Europe: it "converts the stigma [of the Balkans] into a joyful consumption of pleasures forbidden by European norms and taste" (Kiossev 2003, 16). In this respect, *chalga* is an unwanted cultural element in the quest for "westernisation" – and thus it seems to be portrayed in *Glass Home*. In general, it can be said that "good taste", like nearly the entire casting of the series, is predominantly white, upper-class and "western". Let me expand on this further by presenting the aspects of Bulgarian tradition in the series.

The most predominant cultural symbol in *Glass Home* is the "nostalgic cooking" (Kiossev 2003, 16) or traditional Bulgarian cuisine. Owners of the mall, with the exception of Boryana, consume caviar, sprouts on toast, "Dream" salads and fine wines, even in their homes. Elena is never seen cooking, except when Hristo's mother Magdalena comes around – and even then she tends to order takeaway and pretend she made it. M-Center security guard Anton Stavrev's wife Vanya, however, prepares all the traditional Bulgarian dishes for her very traditional husband: in the Stavrev's home there are always leeks, garlic, *гювеч* (gyuvech; Eng. *stew*), *сърми* (sarmi; Eng. *stuffed vine leaves*), *суджук* (sudzhuk; Eng. *spicy sausage*), and other local delicacies. They are considered too simple and unhealthy, as well as downright archaic and vulgar by the modernised, urban elite.

> **Vanya:** What is this black stuff?
>
> **Hristo:** The black stuff is the cousin of the red stuff. Caviar.
>
> **Vanya:** What?
>
> **Hristo:** Caviar.
>
> **Vanya:** Ahh! *[laughs]* Yeah right!

Similarly, other traditions such as folk dance are unceremoniously discarded by the same elite. These traditions are not incidentally also the ones that have proliferated in the national branding of Bulgaria beginning in the National Revival period. However, Bulgaria's westernisation and modernisation goals of the 21st century are in part contradictory with a predominantly ancient selfhood, thus they have been cast aside for adopted western cultural symbols. Naturally, urbanisation and

globalisation has caused upheaval around the world by blurring the borders of cultural belonging and meshing cultural symbols, but the case of Bulgaria (and, arguably, the Balkans) is one that has experienced such a development without having had much of a chance to build a nation-state-based ideology and cultural selfhood. Thus, Bulgarian self-colonisation is directed at its past (archaic, outdated), present (incomplete, semi-developed, mimicry) and future (never removed from periphery).

> **Elena:** What are you going to do with that? Collect money?
>
> **Vanya:** What of it? The best man gets to have a speech and a *horo*[14]… The bridesmaid – nothing!
>
> **Elena:** *Horo*? I don't think so.
>
> **Vanya:** What do you mean? Won't there be a *horo*? Well, you really crippled this wedding!

Photo 3: Bay Ganyo the European (Бай Ганьо европеец). Source: https://goo.gl/UsyMcw.

Let us then consider the most famous "Bulgarian" character and stereotype, Bay Ganyo Balkanski, created during the Bulgarian National Revival by Aleko Konstantinov (1863-1897). "Uncle Ganyo of the Balkans", as his name could be translated, is a satirical character of the "authentic" Bulgarian/Balkan man – a mirror of the worst qualities of the Bulgarian nature, but one which also distorts (Daskalov 2001, 530). In the numerous adventures in the Bay Ganyo series, he is depicted as an uncivilised, audacious crook, a cunning opportunist, with a backward logic and lack of manners. Konstantinov's unscrupulous rose oil

[14] Balkan folk dance performed in a circle, also known as *hora* and *oro*.

salesman travels to several European cities in order to sell his merchandise and returns home "Europeanised", but only by appearance, which contrasts clearly with his foolish character. Aleko (as he is known to all Bulgarians) "was targeting vulgarity and anticulture in opposition to a notion of civilized Europe" (Todorova 2009, 40), however there is a debate on whether Bay Ganyo was in fact a representation of the Bulgarian national character or a personified commentary on the divide of social classes (ibid., 39).

> **Stavrev:** Hey, shit-pants, you will not talk to me this way! I'll give you few good slaps if you do!
>
> **Hari:** *[in English]* Peace, sorry…
>
> **Stavrev:** All of you are hiding something from me, but don't ever think I will not find out. And you will speak to me only in Bulgarian! Are we clear? Only in Bulgarian!
>
> **Hari:** Don't get flustered, calm down.

Glass Home's Anton Stavrev is a sort of human guidebook of all things authentically Bulgarian and aids Kamen in his adaptation back to Bulgarian society. Stavrev is treated by M-Center partner Elena like a Bay Ganyo stereotype. There are plenty of similarities: both are cunning, but incessantly exuberant types, who love a good meal, drink and merry company. Like Bay Ganyo, Stavrev is a man who favours "authentic" Bulgarian cultural products and is not always up to speed with the latest developments. However, the lack of civilisation and greediness attributed to him by Elena are false: he is loyal, honest and relatively immaterialist. Elena is in fact a much more representative Bay Ganyo: her lack of authenticity and cultural capital is especially glaring against her fancy and expensive garb. Her incessant plotting and scheming for profit also point to unscrupulousness, albeit Elena is definitely not a clown character. I will return to her in chapter 5.2.1.

> **Stavrev:** You are even welcome to ours, so I can prepare an authentic Bulgarian evening – *yunashka*.[15]
>
> **Kamen:** *Yunashka*? What is that?
>
> **Stavrev:** Are you kidding me? Rakia and salad – that's what it is. (…) But you don't seem to drink anymore. Well, no problem, for you – buttermilk… Okay then, ayran[16] instead!
>
> **Protesting mother:** And because there are no adjudicated people in this country, I want everyone to understand of what we, the mothers, are capable!

Searching the data for positive markers of the Bulgarian space, I have been able to find only a few. On one hand, characters like Elena are like fish in water in the midst of intrigue and corruption, thus favourably evaluating certain aspects of Bulgarian society otherwise negatively evaluated by others. Elena uses her connections and her wealth to her advantage, making sure she always has the upper hand in business and in social relationships. The only instances where Elena curses the state of affairs in Bulgaria is when her cunning schemes fail.

> **Hristo:** So why are they delaying [the results]? They should have published them 30 minutes ago.
>
> **Elena:** Because within the municipality nothing happens on time.

On the other hand, there are several politicians in the series, who represent the voice of "positive change" in Bulgaria. Two different Mayors of Sofia make appearances, both being violent and corrupt politicians with tight connections to the Bulgarian

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[15] The South Slavic mythical heroes, *юнаци* (yunatsi) are mythical characters of Proto-Bulgarian paganism: young, courageous, full-bodied men with inhuman strength and superhuman abilities. The *yunak*, connects the spiritual and the earthly world. In the context of the dialogue above, however, the term denotes a "heroic" evening, alluding to the large amount of rakia, which would be consumed by the partakers.

[16] A cold yoghurt drink with a pinch of salt very popular in the Balkans, Turkey and in the Middle Eastern as well as Caucasus region.

mafia, as well as morally abhorrent men. Their positive evaluations of the "new direction" taken within the Bulgarian space are presented with a great deal of irony.

> **Mayor Sarafov:** *[on television]* Citizens can see how many changes have happened in our capital during the last two years.
>
> **Hristo:** Idiot…
>
> **Mayor Sarafov:** There are more parking spaces, less traffic jams, and compared to previous periods criminality has reduced by two–
>
> *[Hristo turns off the television]*

When Mayor Sarafov (season 3) denounces the actions of his political enemies to media representatives, he is in fact trying to smooth over his own image, the viewer (*in* the series as well as *of* the series) is aware of the masquerade, but there is also a strong sense of resignation in relation to social or political change. The series comments on the obvious discrepancy between the deeds and the appearances of politicians. Those living in Bulgaria do not need to "turn the sound off and on" (as Žižek suggests) to understand the interplay of political, economic and social factors behind such flagrantly deceitful displays. Instead, they would rather turn the television off, because they feel the situation has not changed in decades. However, the series was created on the cusp of a serious change in public behaviour, and I will address this issue in chapters 5.4 and 5.5.

> **Housekeeper:** Where there are millions, my girl, there is no law. Well… I am not pointing fingers. Zhekov is my kind of guy, but… In Bulgaria, the rich are not prosecuted. He will catch himself a shark attorney, give some hush money and you can expect him for dinner tonight.

In summary, the representations and mentions of the shared Balkan social or cultural milieu in *Glass Home* are scarce, and symbols of the shared Bulgarian identity disassociated. The favourable counterpart is always modernity, Europeanism, internationalism – all of which are incompatible with archaic Bulgarian folk culture. Exhibits of "high life" or consumerist culture, such high-end apartments, restaurants and hotels are presented as progressive and desirable

aspects of Bulgarian modernity. Thus, Balkanist discourse in relation to Bulgaria in the data is plentiful: "Balkan" and "traditional Bulgarian" traits within Bulgarian culture are considered present, but highly unwanted by the urban elite. Additionally, *Glass Home* conveys the message that Bulgarian political space are eternally corrupt and stagnant. Thus, let us turn to the most divisive, socio-economic factors in Bulgarian society.

5.2.1 Corruption and socio-economic class

Bulgarian cultural anthropologist Valentina Gueorguieva's (2014) analysis of new Bulgarian television series (since 2010) shows similar trajectories and tendencies across the spectrum. Gueorguieva divides her findings on *Glass Home* and other series of the same period into two categories, of which the first is plot and narrative structure. She argues that "without exception, the storyline of all new Bulgarian TV series is staged in the social and political context of contemporary Bulgaria" (Gueorguieva 2014, 94). Many events of the recent Bulgarian political history can be recognized in the series, such as the plotline Mayor Sarafov running for president (albeit it has been claimed in the Bulgarian press that "any similarity to actual persons and events is random"[17]). Gueorguieva (2014) rightly points out that the series lacks a moral (or even just alternative) exemplar to "power, money and criminality". The representation of an extremely consumerist society, albeit not always glorified, is certainly not condemned. Instead, resignation is adopted across the series, which in turn normalizes criminal activities, the imbalance of power, consumerism and egotism. The resignation is mirroring the staggering emigration statistics of Bulgaria, specifically in 2009, 2010 and 2013 (see chapter 3). Finally, the luxury of a criminal lifestyle is marketed to the viewer as desirable.

> **Stavrev:** Well, I don't have change. What can I do? Keep six-fifty in my pocket every time I feel like reading a magazine?

[17] "Кметът в "Стъклен дом" не подражава на Бойко Борисов." *24 часа,* Jun 3, 2011. Accessed Mar 4, 2017. https://www.24chasa.bg/Article/915996.

> **Magazine seller:** I am sorry; I don't have change for you.
>
> *[Kamen gives Anton his credit card]*
>
> **Stavrev:** Eh, can you buy a newspaper with this thing?
>
> **Kamen:** Everything you want.
>
> **Stavrev:** *[to the magazine seller]* Do you take these kinds of things?
>
> **Magazine seller:** What type of card is it?
>
> **Kamen:** Visa.
>
> **Magazine seller:** Of course, no problem. *[passes the magazine]* Here you are.
>
> **Stavrev:** Eh, that's a pretty big deal! I also have one at home, but why don't I use it?

The sentence "Имате ли по-дребни?" (Eng. Do you have change?) is emblematic of a society operating on cash and not trusting banks; a society, where prices of goods are low, but salaries are even lower; a society, where "customer service" only exists as a sloppy copy of the "western" original. Even when one has the means to buy a newspaper, one cannot necessarily do so due to external obstacles, such as the cashier not having any change to spare. Modernisation and sophistication, in this case, means plastic money, which could be used anytime and anywhere. Yet using the Visa as a "common cultural currency" (Gelner 1983, quoted in Kiossev 2011, 4) does not simply require wealth, but sophistication, which is simultaneously impossible without wealth. The centre – in this case, the economic elite – is the reference point, the higher self that dictates the rules of the cultural game. Consequently, when the owners of M-Center refer to the lower socio-economic strata of Bulgarians as "villagers", they are referring not only to the divide between urban and rural geospatiality, but also to the failure of parts of the nation in "keeping up with Joneses". Due to the manner in which Bulgaria has transitioned from socialism to liberal democracy, the construction of the Bulgarian cultural self has been built within the frames of a western civilizational model, which dictates certain levels of economy, education, technology, judiciary and political participation,

amongst others. Thus, analysing markers of the socio-economic divide of Bulgarians in the data and their reflections on socio-economic issues separately from cultural markers would be a mistake.

> **Elena:** You should know that nowadays you can buy anything with money. And what you cannot buy with money, you can buy with a lot of money.

In his lament on the Bulgarian government's restrictions in cultural finances, Ivo Draganov (2010) shares the bleak outlook of *Glass Home* on Bulgarian economics. He "Balkanises" the Bulgarian society and claims that in it typically everything is for sale. The lament echoes ones made by contemporaries of Aleko, who disparaged at "the clash between the lofty ideals of the revival period and the rapid bourgeois corruption of 'free' Bulgaria" (Igov 1993, in Todorova 2009, 39) represented by Bay Ganyo. The sacred nature of money is glaring in the data and reveals the lamented *bayganyovshtina*[18] of Bulgarian society. However, this lament has been unfairly directed at something called "Bulgarian culture" or "Bulgarian values", when socio-economic factors – whether we speak about the transition from agrarian to urban society or from socialist totalitarianism to capitalist democracy, and others – have supported the rise of *bayganyovshtina* in all societies, also in "the west". The perceived lack of sophistication in Bay Ganyo can easily be attributed to his positioning in society: he is a village businessman turned nouveau riche. The satire of his characteristics is representative of a divided society in terms of socio-economic and cultural capital, where the old intelligentsia is positioned against a new, economic and/or political bourgeoisie. The latter of the two is considered uncultivated in comparison and thus a threat to the old world order, in which education and "civilisation" go hand in hand with economic and political power. In western European democracies the middle classes have thrived for over a century and the thresholds of education and political participation – albeit still very much "hereditary" – are much lower than in post-Socialist states. Thus the Bay Ganyo

[18] "Boorishness, crudeness, grossness" (Todorova 2009, 39).

mirror distorts the representation of cultural identity by combining it with a long-lasting representation of the socio-economic struggles of liberalisation and democratisation.

> **Elena:** Let me explain what these wretches are prepared to do: anything for a lev.

In this respect, Elena from *Glass Home* is the Bay Ganyo returning from Europe, who, convinced of his sophistication, decides to put everyone else in their place. In contrast with her husband Hristo, a descendant of an affluent family with strong connections, education and cultivation, Elena is a from-rags-to-riches kind of character, a social climber. Her mother-in-law does not approve of her marriage with Hristo and treats her like a servant. The difference in character between Elena and Hristo is also notable. Elena is an extremely materialistic mercenary, whereas Hristo has an air of refinement and confidence in his stature, as he has not had to fight for his position in the top layer of society. During the first season, Elena even attempts to embezzle Hristo's shares from M-Center and leave him for his co-partner Nikolai Zhekov. In the third season, after divorcing Elena, Hristo begins to heavily drink and engage in prostitution, yet he still does not seem to fear for his position in M-Center or in the social strata. Elena, on the other hand, remarries upwards to Mayor Sarafov.

> **Elena:** You never cease to amaze me. Your husband is a millionaire, but you want to earn your own money, by working. (…) Well, every gratuitous pleasure seems suspicious to me. (…) But Vanya is a hairdresser – she counts her tips, for god's sake! There is no space for her among people with credit cards.

Elena dances to the tune of capitalism without much consideration for education, literature, art and other "soul and brain food". She seems to have chosen to marry in order to have economic stability, instead of for love, and perhaps had to justify this choice to herself. Elena's strong aversion to members of the lower social classes is connected closely to her past experiences, but she is also symbolic of the Bulgarian nouveaux riche as well as the bourgeoisie described by Igov. The nouveaux riche may not be as highly educated, and their consumption of culture

(albeit not on the level of the precariat, who consume soap operas and chalga), still leans too heavily towards the popular to be a marker of the cultural elite. Elena is thus less well-read than even Stavrev, the target of most of her disgust. Stavrev, namely, spends most of his dialogue in the series quoting Sun Tzu, a military strategist and philosopher from the 500s BCE – which is at least one author more than Elena has ever mentioned. Similarly, none of the owners of M-Center are presented reading anything else but contracts or newspapers, with the exception of Boryana Kasabova. The separation of economic and cultural (or even spiritual) capital is apparent, yet the connection of such cultural capital to specifically Bulgarian identity is artificial at best.

> **Elena:** Do you understand that we are losing everything?! The company, the money, the house – everything!
>
> **Hristo:** And do you understand that this is about my life?!
>
> **Elena:** I could care less about your life! I will never be poor – never!

Contrastively, Hristo, whilst not exactly associating with members of the lower classes, keeps a respectful conduct with the Stavrevs, and in the second season even goes to great lengths to save Stavrev's position as head of security. Hristo is not a particularly "modern" or internationalised man, but these attributes are not visibly connected to his Bulgarian cultural identity. Due to his relatively stable position in the upper levels of the Bulgarian social hierarchy, Hristo does not need to acquiesce to simplistic representations of cultural selfhood, because his socio-economic status, heritage, upbringing, education, roles in the family and society, ethnicity, as well as his values and even gender are not contradictory to the societal ideal. Thus, Hristo's failings (such as his refusal to modernise) are attributed to his person, not a shared culture, which is also a source of embarrassment.

> **Hristo:** What is this?
>
> **Hari:** Do you like it? That is… Your *desktop* was on *default* so I changed it.
>
> **Hristo:** My [desktop] was what?

> **Hari:** *Default*.
>
> **Hristo:** *Default*? (…) Elena, what is this *default*, huh?

In addition to circumstantial obstacles, the series comments on certain grievances of Bulgarian society, which are directly caused by people with a certain agenda. Corruption is not merely a stereotypical narrative in the Balkans, it is also hard-hitting reality. Corruption is present in the narrative of *Glass Home*, as already seen in some examples in 5.2, but it does not happen only on the level of politics, beginning with Nikolai Zhekov hiring an assassin in order to sell the murdered Dimitar's business for profit, continuing with Elena's involvement with Nikolai (also for profit), and ending with Nikolai's orchestrated game of extortion, in which he buys back his share of the business to begin a money laundering operation. The same mechanisms – however deplorable in the hands of bad people – are accepted and exploited by all, as well as used as markers of self-identification. Once again, *bayganyovshtina* seems to simply be a way of survival for Bulgarians, but its prominence in society is attributed to a shared culture, instead of shared socio-economic struggles.

> **Elena:** How are you feeling after the big news?
>
> **Boryana:** How are we supposed to feel? Everything is possible in this country.

The self-colonisation of Bulgarians as a corrupt society is visible in the way the series portrays the outsider's view. In the first season, a Japanese buyer withdraws from doing business with M-Center due to the conflict of values. Akiko and the company she represents have spent the last eight years in Bulgaria, but are now considering throwing in the towel and returning to Japan due to the clash of (business) cultures they have experienced. As the writers of the series are Bulgarian, I would argue that this is a textbook example of self-colonisation and self-stigmatisation: members of the in-group (Bulgarian screenplay writers) relay an internalised negative perception stemming from unfavourable comparison with "developed democracies", and in this case literally personify the viewpoint of an outsider (Japanese businesswoman) looking in.

> **Akiko:** I have been in Bulgaria for eight years, Mr Kasabov. I know your character well enough.
>
> **Kamen:** Well, I have not lived in Bulgaria for 18 years.
>
> **Akiko:** It doesn't make you different. Here everyone gives hush money. (…) Look… It's not only about your company. We are considering withdrawing from Bulgaria altogether. Here affairs are against our principles.

There is little resistance against this point of view. The only counterargument Kamen seems to have is that he has been detached from the cultural space that is Bulgaria for almost two decades, thus making him a suitable business partner. Defending Bulgarian (business) culture seems to be out of the question. Kamen says nothing about his own partners at M-Center: those who, as explained before, launder money, blackmail, steal and engage in fraud. Additionally, when speaking to Prosecutor Mitev about his problem with the Japanese company, Mitev simply states that "for the Japanese, corruption is something dirty", which alludes to the idea that Bulgarians do not have the same view on corruption at all. Thus, corruption and the socio-economic divide is very obviously part of the Bulgarian cultural self-designation.

> **Dani:** *[to bartender Koki]* Gimme a whisky.
>
> **Patso and Koki:** *[in unison]* They gave him a Visa!
>
> **Patso:** *[to Dani]* Hit the PIN.
>
> **Dani:** *[to Koki]* Gimme the whisky.
>
> **Patso:** And now what?
>
> **Dani:** Gimme another whisky.
>
> **Patso:** Hit the PIN. *[to Koki]* Now gimme my whisky.
>
> **Dani:** *[to Koki]* Hit me with a cashew.
>
> (…)
>
> **Patso:** But some places only accept cash.

Dani: I don't go to those places.

The data thus suggests that whilst technological advancement and higher level of income has entered lives of Bulgarians on a larger scale, civilisation is still a privilege of the elites, as well as defined and legitimised by those elites. However, in contrast with Aleko's contemporaries, the elites of the 2010s are primarily those with monetary and political power, instead of cultural capital. Thus, the symbols of advancement and civilisation are credit cards and expensive cars, not intellectual property. Education is considered instrumental to economic success, not democracy and equality on a societal level. Due to these processes, the Bay Ganyo character, whilst despised, also visibly prevails as the feeling of loss in terms of cultural heritage in post-Socialist Bulgaria is mirrored in the "nesting orientalisms" and othering happening within the society.

5.3 Kaleidoscope of Ethnicities?

As a child in Bulgaria, one of the first toys I remember having was a toy kaleidoscope tube, which, like the mosaic, could be used as a visual symbol of plurality, multiculturalism and coexistence. It is different from the "melting pot" ideology of the United States: within a "cultural mosaic", cultural differences are fostered, instead of artificially creating an umbrella culture to encompass them all. Bulgaria is a mixed territory with a long history of migratory flows and conquering empires, as well as empiredom by itself, but is it a kaleidoscope of ethnicities?

Gueorguieva (2014) outlines that out of the ten new Bulgarian TV series produced between 2010 and 2013, only *Glass Home* includes depictions of ethnic minorities. It reflects a precarious balance, which Bulgarian society is attempting to maintain in fear of ethnic confrontation. The ethnic divide of the Bulgarian population in 2011 was estimated as the following: Turks (8 %) and Roma (4.4 %), as well as Russians, Armenians, Vlachs, Greeks, Macedonians, Jews, and Romanians (0.7 %

or less).[19] However, it is important to note that roughly 10 per cent of the population has not indicated their ethnicity. Many of those refusing to indicate it are very likely to be vulnerable and discriminated groups such as Roma. Additionally, when stating their ethnicity, many may choose "Bulgarian" in order not to be discriminated against. Let us now discuss the findings in the data below.

5.3.1 Absent Enemy: Turks

"We see before us only one enemy – the Turk; and it is against that enemy that we will rise." (Vazov 1912, 74)

Having discussed the historical background and colonisation perspective with relation to the Ottoman rule over Bulgaria (chapter 2.3), I would like to address the complete absence of references to Turks, Pomacs or Muslims in the data. In fact, relations with Turkey, Turkish politics or the historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire are almost not mentioned at all. The only whiff of such references comes in the form of several Turkish loanwords, which have been used casually in the dialogue, as well as one (Orientalist) reference to the Turkish judicial system. In this chapter, I will firstly present the loanwords, explain their meaning and analyse their usage. Thereafter, I will speak more broadly about the general Turkish absence in the series.

> **Elena:** You have invited the Stavrev family. (…) But Vanya is a hairdresser – she counts her tips, for god's sake!

The Turkisms I collected from four seasons are scarce, only some ten words in total. Many of these words are connected with money; in fact, the Bulgarian word for "coin" (and in its plural form, the most common word for "money") is *пара* (para), which in itself is a Turkism. Additionally, *рушвет* (rushvet) denounces a "bribe" or "hush money", and is used several times in the series. The Slavic, less colloquial equivalent is *подкуп* (podkup), which is used mostly as the verb "to bribe", *да*

[19] The World Factbook, Bulgaria. *CIA.gov.* Last updated Jan 12, 2017. Accessed Apr 5, 2017. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html.

подкупва (da podkupva). *Бакшиш* (bakshish; Eng. *baksheesh*), which originally comes from Persian and is widely used in the Middle East and South Asia, could have possibly entered the Bulgarian language through Turkish influence as well. There are several meanings of the word in Persian: "alms", "charitable donation", "gratuity", "offering" (to the gods), and "bribery". However, in Bulgarian it simply denounces gratuity ("tips") in the customer service industry. *Кяр* (kyar) mainly refers to profit or gain – albeit not necessarily monetary. Moving further away from the monetary theme (yet still remaining under the theme of gain or advantage), the most interesting Turkism in the data is *шуробаджанащина* (shurobadzhanashtina), meaning "cronyism" or "favouritism". Other words heard in the series include *баджанак* (badzhanak), *батак* (batak) and *пич* (pich) – brother-in-law, bog/swamp and dude/mate respectively.

At first glance, one might assume that the negative connotations of many of the words described above (most of them synonymous to greed, fraudulence and corruption) could reflect unfavourable attitudes toward the Turkish language or culture. However, the examples related above are perhaps the most obvious Turkisms and, upon closer inspection of the dialogue, one might find more examples. The purpose of this research is not to delve deep into Bulgarian linguistics, hence the condensed sampling. Instead we can note a tendency in Bulgarian media, first elaborated by Krasteva (in Mevsim and Chakyrova 2007), namely the return of (often archaic) Turkish words common in Bulgarian everyday speech. These words have been popular in the press of the noughties for their "colour" and expressiveness – they capture the audience's attention. However, Mevsim and Chakyrova (2007) discuss that these words are indeed perceived by young Bulgarians as archaic and using them would perhaps alienate young audiences. One could thus deduct that the use of these words in *Glass Home* points to the wish of the screenwriters to captivate their audience, but their infrequency could also suggest the rejection of antiquated cultural markers, such as Turkisms.

> **Attorney:** [The Bulgarian] had been in constant conflict with the captain, inciting the crew to insubordination. They had cut his wages 17 times as punishment. When they reached Bulgarian waters, he asked

> for a day off to come ashore. They refused. He got drunk and struck a match off the shell plating.
>
> **Kamen:** He lit the ship on fire?
>
> **Attorney:** Unfortunately, yes. He was lucky it happened in Bulgarian waters, otherwise they would have prosecuted him in Turkey.

What does the absence of the Turk in *Glass Home* signify? According to Doncheva (2010, 60), Balkan cinema after the Revival Process treated the subject of Islamic minorities with some self-directed shame and criticism. The criticism is not visible in television productions, thus it points to the aforementioned shame being a feeling amongst the cultural elite, but perhaps not among the "common folk" or political and economic elites. However, there is also not much evidence speaking for othering or discrimination either. The single reference to Turkey in the example above compares it unfavourably to Bulgaria, alluding to the severity of consequences for criminal acts. It employs the Orientalist discourse, but hardly says anything at all in the process. On the basis of the data, I would say that Bulgarians in the 2010s have nothing to say about and want nothing to do with Turkey. Being the largest ethnic minority in Bulgaria, the representations of Turks are thus erased from the imagined community of Bulgarians. Combined with the stark whiteness of all characters in *Glass Home* (misrepresentative of many Bulgarians) as well as their wealth, the series relays a very condensed and selective representation of Bulgarian identity. This representation, however, is consistent with Bulgaria's westernisation and Europeanisation goals, for which a connection with Turkey would not play out favourably. Additionally, due to EU's demands in the area of treatment of ethnic minorities, Bulgarians might feel they have a better chance at "fitting into" the European space without emphasising past ethnic tensions, such as the oppression of Bulgarian Turks.

5.3.2 The Call for Social Justice: The Roma Narrative

The representation of Bulgarian Roma in the fourth season of the series is conflicting. *Glass Home* seems to advocate for social justice by bringing to the fore the discrimination and prejudices Roma face in Bulgarian society, but the results

are questionable. In previous seasons, I found only one reference to Roma, which was derogatory, to say the least. In general, as the series focuses on the highest strata of society, it easily excludes discriminated and segregated minorities. Ethnic diversity, as seen also in the previous subchapter, is left almost completely unrepresented in the data.

> **Dani:** Looking at the CVs I actually had a huge favourite called Maya. Languages, education, everything… (…) Well, and she came to the interview and it turned out she is a gypsy.
>
> **Siana:** Great, and what then?
>
> **Dani:** Well, nothing. I mean, I cut her off.
>
> **Siana:** Just because she's a gypsy?
>
> **Dani:** Well, I have nothing against gypsies, but she is not made for this position.

In the fourth season, Dani Kasabov begins to interview several candidates for the position of coordinator of international relations at the mall, among them a young Roma woman. She is his favourite candidate, judging simply by her CV, but when he learns about her ethnic identity, he is quick to dismiss her on the grounds that clients and partners of the mall would not appreciate working with her. After the interview, Maya's brother Todor and his friends threaten Dani for discriminating against Maya; they follow him around a couple of times and taunt him verbally. Dani responds with incredible vehemence: he bludgeons Todor to death in a surprise attack. The staggering disproportion of Dani's fear and anger towards Todor compared with the reality of the threat is emblematic of underlying ethnic tensions, but also representative of violence as "description of a social condition" as well as an "inherent" aspect of the Balkan nature (Bakić-Hayden 1995, 918).

> **Maya:** *[rehearsing for interview]* Maya Stoyanova, nice to meet you!
>
> **Todor:** Gypsy? We don't hire gypsies. (…) I'm not a racist, but you lot are a tribe that steals. You lie, rummage through trash… (…) After

> every interview you come to me and cry. Whatever you tell them, they only see this – gypsy.

In the example above, Todor pretends to be the interviewer and verbalises prejudice toward the Roma population in what could be an example of self-stigmatisation. However, in this case, we cannot say that the writers of this dialogue are ethnic minority representatives, thus it is better evaluated as an insight and critique of the attitudes of non-Roma Bulgarians toward the Roma. The portrayal of Roma people in *Glass Home* is an attempt to break stereotypes, but it does not succeed in having a clear message. Maya is not visually distinguished from ethnic Bulgarians; no one suspects her ethnicity until it is revealed that she lives in the predominantly Roma-populated Sofian quarter "Hristo Botev" (a wonderful example of the identity within geospatiality). The way she dresses for the interview with Dani is in no way tasteless or unprofessional by Bulgarian standards. Her family is also dressed in neutral clothing. However, Dani's friend Koki, adorning a white sweat jacket and gelled hair, meets Maya incognito to suss out her intentions for following up with a crime investigation against her brother's assailant. Koki's attire, seemingly representing a Roma stereotype, is not ridiculed, albeit not elevated either. The data is thus a bit conflicting in interpretation.

> **Dani:** Thanks, mate.
>
> **Todor:** Thanks, huh? What total garbage you are. When you feel like it, we are mates. Otherwise, we are gypsies. We gypsies really love a saying: "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth".

Photo 4: Koki from Glass Home *talking to Maya.*

Nevertheless, there are a couple of aspects that stand out and point to "nesting orientalisms" within Bulgarian society. Firstly, Dani's violence against Todor is excused by the fear of violence he felt and his perception of Roma as a violent "tribe". Secondly, when Todor dies of the injuries inflicted on him, Dani is not apprehended by the people around him. In Boryana's passionate speech against hate crime she emphasizes tolerance toward those who are "different", and she condemns Dani on moral grounds, but only indirectly, because at the time she does not suspect his involvement in the gruesome attack. Suspecting the truth, Koki is only concerned with what action Maya and her family are going to take against Dani. Even Kamen, the moral compass, helps Dani with an alibi, and the man of the hour himself seems mostly concerned with the repercussions of his crime, rather than the question of whether what he did was right or wrong. Dani's girlfriend, Siana sides strongly with the Roma minority by questioning Dani's motives for dismissing Maya. Throughout the series, Siana fortifies her position as the defender of the weak and ostracized after she aborts her child with grave consequences (she is no longer able to have children) and becomes herself an outcast of Bulgarian society due to her inability to perform her "womanly duties". Even after her fertility magically returns, she continues to practice tolerance and understanding towards minorities, disabled people and even criminals. Dani, in turn, continues to argue

against Maya's capabilities for the offered position by denying his responsibility and underlining his concern for how Maya would be treated by clients at work, i.e. referring to other people's prejudice.

> **Boryana:** Also, I think that as parents we need to raise our children to love and respect those who are different. I hope that the people who committed this brutality will be caught and punished.

Research from the perspective of gender studies could produce some interesting results on the issue of ethnic discrimination. The "masculinity" of the Balkans (in contrast with the "female" nature of the Orient) (Todorova 2009) is visible in the machismo with which Dani, Koki and Patso go about the conflict with Todor and his friends. The defenders of ethnic minorities are all female: Boryana, Siana and the secretary of the mall, Neli. They are portrayed as good-natured and kind, but due to the lack of repercussions for Dani, the viewer is not convinced that the women were in any way morally superior or "right". Ethnic minorities are thus mostly othered and excluded in the series, even if the intentions of the writers have been to condemn discrimination. The role of minorities within the shared Bulgarian cultural identity is not properly addressed. It is abundantly clear that assimilation of ethnic minorities is still expected in the Bulgarian context, at least when it comes to working culture.

5.4 "Not from around here" – the post-migratory identity

"During the last 25 years we are leaving. [Bulgaria] has turned into a place (...) of existential departure. And that is the saddest migration."[20]

(Georgi Gospodinov, 2016; my translation)

After considering the Bulgarians and ethnic minorities, I would like to move on to the marker of a certain level of non-Bulgarianness that comes with migratory

[20] "'Там, където не сме'" – новата книга на Георги Господинов." БНТ – Панорама с Бойко Василев, Apr 15, 2016. Accessed Apr 7, 2017. http://imedia.bnt.bg/predavanyia/panorama-s-bojko-vasilev/armiya-i-granitsa-ministar-nikolaj-nenchev?590560.

experience. In the Balkan context, migration processes are not novel, but in the post-1989 political and economic developments, they have definitely intensified. Additionally, the concept of the nation, national belonging and territory have become fragmented and in need of updating, because of modern globalisation. (Doncheva 2010) The fact that these concepts were only seriously re-evaluated at the end of the 20th century, shows the domination of a Europe-centric worldview in research as well as a clear nationalist agenda around Europe and the Balkans.

The migrant experience has been an important subject for Bulgarian (and Balkan) film and literature since the 1970s, but here I want to address specifically the artistic works from the 1990s and beginning of 2000s, which deal with post-communist economic migration. Films such as *Писмо до Америка* (Pismo do Amerika, Eng. *Letter to America*, 2000, dir. Iglika Triffonova); *Под едно небе* (Pod edno nebe, Eng. *Under the Same Sky*, 2003, dir. Krassimir Kroumov); *Baklava* (2007, dir. Alexo Petrov); *Тилт* (Tilt, 2011, dir. Viktor Chouchkov Jr.); *Вяра, любов и уиски* (Vyara, lyubov i uiski, Eng. *Faith, Love and Whiskey*, 2013, dir. Kristina Nikolova), and others touch on the struggles of the transition period in Bulgaria. In the literary scene, one of the most well known examples is postmodernist author Georgi Gospodinov (b. 1968), whose nostalgic novels often recreate the feeling of *saudade*: a deep longing for something or someone that is gone and might never return again. For most Bulgarian migrants of the last twenty years, memories of their life before migration are not simply distorted by the fleeting nature of memory in relation to time. The rapid societal changes in post-communist Bulgaria actually created a vast gap between the reality that was and the reality that is. Additionally, Gospodinov (quoted above) talks about "existential" migration, which does not require physical departure. Instead it demarcates the intellectual and cultural separation of the individual from Bulgarian society.

According to Gergana Doncheva, a Bulgarian scholar in Cultural Studies and Political Science, the representations of migration in Balkan cinema can be divided into three categories: victimisation of the immigrant, separation from homeland as the only solution, and the alienation of the individual ("immigrant in one's own homeland") (Doncheva 2010, 133; my translation) – the latter of which could also

be connected to existential migration. *Glass Home* proves an interesting subject for the application of Doncheva's models of the migrant experience. The journey westward of Kamen Kasabov, though spurred by his alcoholic and abusive father rather than financial crises, is a journey motivated by victimhood. In his memories (presented as flashbacks in the series), Kamen is an indirect victim of his father's abuse: he has to watch his mother suffer emotionally and physically, without being able to help her, until finally she commits suicide. Kamen, enraged with his father, immigrates to the United States with falsified documents. There, he becomes a successful lawyer, marries and has a daughter, but his marriage starts to fall apart because of Kamen's extreme devotion to his work. Kamen's wife finally leaves him after the tragic death of their daughter in a car accident, for which Kamen blames himself. He falls into depression and alcoholism for some time, but during his recovery begins to understand and forgive his father. After a momentary happy reunion in Sofia, Kamen is once again reduced to a victim, as Dimitar is shot before his eyes. He spends the first season of *Glass Home* dwelling on the lost time for him and Dimitar and battling against his newly found love for Boryana, Dimitar's widow. For a while, it seems his traumatic experiences in the States as well as Bulgaria have rendered him completely rootless and homeless: he often repeats the same phrase, "there is nothing for me here/there". In this respect, the decision to migrate for Kamen is indeed "painful and tormenting" (ibid.) and his experiences abroad are, to a certain extent, traumatic. On the other hand, the detachment from "a place of total timelessness, where nothing happens or if it does, it is always repeated" (ibid.) is presented as the only solution for Kamen to survive. After Dimitar returns, revealing his staged death, and reclaims his wife Boryana, his place in the business and his general authority, Kamen once again considers emigration. Only by the third season, after Kamen and Boryana finally marry and Dimitar accepts their relationship, is Kamen freed from victimization and begins a new life.

"The state of alienation of the individual, located on equal distance from both the "foreign" and the "own", [the migrant] has become a peculiar "immigrant in their own country", Doncheva (2010, 113) continues. In other words, the separation from a territory puts into question the loyalty felt towards one's homeland or nation

(ibid., 117-118). I would elaborate Doncheva's statement as follows: the loyalty towards a homeland or nation is also loyalty towards a *fictiõ* of national identity and a wish to protect one's self-identification as a true member of "us". In reality, the multiplicity of (cultural) identity blurs the borders of the traditional concept of the nation-state and can be seen as dangerous. Non-migrants may even question the migrant's position, because they feel their self-identification threatened by the crossing of cultural borders. Likewise, other non-migrants who do not conform to the *fictiõ*, such as the Bulgarian Muslim population, may be targeted.

> **Elena:** Don't you want a glass of wine after all?
>
> **Kamen:** No no, seriously, I don't drink.
>
> **Elena:** *[laughing]* Believe me, that is very strange for Bulgaria.

In the first season of *Glass Home,* Kamen is often called *американчето* (amerikancheto) or *момчето от Америка* (momcheto ot Amerika), both meaning the American boy. Other characters in the series stress his alienation and difference from Bulgarian culture. The gaps in his knowledge are explained by the long absence from his homeland: because he has not been around, as Stavrev puts it. In this respect, the physical absence of Kamen translates into an absence of current knowledge of the state of affairs in Bulgaria for the last 18 years. Kamen migrates to the United States in 1992, right in the middle of the transition period, and returns to a democratic nation-state. which has become a member of NATO as well as the EU, and which has progressed in terms of liberal economy. Especially considering that digital mass media was not yet widely spread in the 1990s, during the first decade of Kamen's life in the States he would have most likely been relatively cut off from news of Bulgaria.

The return of Kamen to his fatherland leads us to the sub-motif, if you will, of the Bulgarian migratory experience: the prodigal son. In another successful BTV production, *Столичани в повече* (Stolichani v poveche; Eng. *Sofianites in Excess*, 2011—), Spas Lyutov returns to his home village Izvor (located in Slivnitsa, Sofia Province, 22 kilometres from the Bulgarian capital) from Australia after a long

absence to attend his brother's wedding. The migration of young men[21] is symbolic of the economic and political struggles of post-communist Bulgaria, such as unemployment, deficit and hyperinflation, but their return is symbolic of a certain romanticized idea of homeland. In relation to the masculinity of Balkanism, it is also a symbolic loss of manhood or what it means to be a man.

> **Kamen:** A person, who explains himself too much, seems guilty. We are not guilty. My father is clean. That is why we will not answer the yellow press.
>
> **Elena:** Sounds wonderful, but that's not for Bulgaria. Here people adore gossip!
>
> **Kamen:** Everywhere is the same.

Upon returning to Bulgaria, Kamen enters the limbo position of a migrant distanced from his cultural glasses and thus also distanced from the collective imagination of self-colonisation and self-stigmatisation. Kamen attempts to resolve conflicts abiding by the cultural norms of the United States, but soon realises he is a fish out of water and reveals self-stigmatisation towards his Bulgarian identity: "we" are perceived as corrupt, immoral, materialistic, unintelligent and inferior. I write "we", because I argue that Kamen begins to include himself in his descriptions of corrupt Bulgarians. If Kamen had begun to self-identify as an American, he would be hard-pressed to agree with the negative definitions of his selfhood presented by his Bulgarian peers. In the example below, however, he attributes unintelligence to "us" as a group for not discerning the absence of morality within "our" society.

> **Elena:** *[looking at a newspaper article]* Emil Yosifov. The most corrupt journalist I know. For a portion of pork chops for lunch he is ready to write that I am a countess.

---

[21] The women are often overlooked, as Bulgarian society is still based on relatively traditional gender roles. For an alternative example account of Bulgarian emigrant women in the technology industry, please see *Copy Me, I Want to Travel* (2004, dir. Pauline Boudry, Birgitta Kuster, and Renate Lorenz).

> **Kamen:** And we wonder what is wrong with this country…
>
> **Elena:** Why? What's wrong?
>
> **Kamen:** Everyone bribes, everyone lies. And finally the the guilty are the ones, who don't pay their share.

As the seasons of *Glass Home* progress, instead of being surprised by fraudulence, Kamen begins to consider aspects appealing to the Balkanist discourse. Additionally, he seems to partake in the shared sense of resignation for some time, although he continues to be a force majeure of political and social action in future seasons. Kamen thus does not resign himself to existential migration. Finally, in the fourth season, a vigilante crew (Kamen, Stavrev, Kolev, Elena) led by Dimitar decides to reveal the criminal deeds of Mayor Sarafov, in order to hinder his presidential campaign. This plot line is the first in the series, where political change is pursued by not only Kamen alone and not only for personal reasons. Some of the other characters, like Dani and Boryana, continue to self-colonise and perceive their society as stagnant (see chapter 5.5). However, the normalisation of corruption and criminality is at least temporarily cast aside in favour of Dimitar's argument for an overhaul of the essentialist notion of a shared cultural space, in which collective (or individual) action is futile. The series thusly predicts upcoming tumultuous events: the ten-month protests against the Bulgarian government in 2013-2014. According to Kiossev's analysis of the protests in the summer of 2013, they were triggered by the exacerbation of "moral patience" among Bulgarians after the government entrusted media mogul, oligarch Delyan Peevski the post of head of security. The nomination of Peevski became symbolic of the "brazenness of politicians" and their support of organised crime.[22] Even though such a clear, singular event launched the protests, it is safe to assume that tension had been bubbling under, probably already in 2012, when the fourth season of *Glass Home* was broadcasted.

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[22] "Kiossev: 'There's a moral solidarity in Bulgaria.'" *Deutsche Welle*, Jul 7, 2013. Accessed Mar 26, 2017. http://www.dw.com/en/kiossev-theres-a-moral-solidarity-in-bulgaria/a-16974332.

> **Boryana:** And while we punish criminals, our lives pass us by!
>
> **Dimitar:** We've been unable to fix [our country] for 20 years now with that type of thinking! Everyone is looking to keep quiet.

The moral outrage of Bulgarians represents a violent rejection of values considered alien (Kiossev 1999, 2) and speaks for a step in a direction of cultural self-identification by way of elimination: we are *not* like that! Migration served as an escape from timelessness, but then also as a catalyst of the overhaul of established cultural norms. Migration now also furthers something of an anti-Balkanist movement. The task of creating an opposition for the Bulgarians may be a difficult one due to a long history under a totalitarian regime or an even longer history as an object, instead of a subject. The transition in politics and economics is thus connected to a transition within processes of self-identification.

5.5 Transitional Incompleteness

"Европейци сме ний, ама все не дотам."[23]

Aleko Konstantinov (1863-1897)

As the final theme, I want to address the bridge and crossroads that is Bulgarian cultural identity. In this chapter, I will firstly discuss the markers of Bulgarian identity positioning in relation to Russia and the Soviet Union on one hand, and the European Union and the United States on the other. I will examine the three men of the old world order in *Glass Home*: Stavrev, Agent Kolev and Mister X. Finally, I will address the global and glocal (combining the universal and the particular) cultural semi-identities within Bulgarian self-identification. I will also attempt to encapsulate all aforementioned themes under the umbrella of timelessness of the Bulgarian cultural space – a thematic visible throughout the series – as well as the bridge metaphor in relation to obscurity of cultural identify, transitionality, lack of direction, despondency and stagnancy.

[23] "Europeans we are, but not quite."

Let me begin by returning to Ivan Vazov's (1850-1921) *Under the Yoke* (1894), mentioned as one of the sources for victimhood narratives from Ottoman rule. It also presents us with an admired image of the mighty Russian, an aspiration for the Bulgarians. The big Slav brother holds a close connection to Bulgaria by history, culture, language and religion. The Russian army notoriously liberated Bulgaria from the Ottomans in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, thus spurring favourable accounts of fraternity, such as Vazov's. A mythologiser of the April Uprising of 1876 and active participant in the revolutionary movement, Vazov wrote *Under the Yoke* during his exile in Odessa, thus also connecting the work to migratory experience.

> *"As for the principles of Socialism to which you have treated us, we cannot stomach them. Bulgarian common sense rejects them, and they will never find a field in Bulgaria, either now or at any other time." (Vazov 1912, 74)*

At the turn of the 20th century, however, Vazov's Russophilia turned into Russophobia: he became disappointed with the political and military actions of Russia during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and the First World War, and subsequently argued against Socialism in his later literary work. The Communist leaders of the People's Republic of Bulgaria covered up the real histories of national figures such as Vazov in order not to undermine their power, and even falsely proclaimed many of them as Socialists. Vazov's history as an active member of the centre-right and Europeanist People's Party (1894-1920) as well as his outspokenness against such leftist agendas as building a strong public sector were concealed.[24]

Considering Bulgaria's Communist past, which has been primarily rejected during the last two decades, as well as the aspirations of the democratic period to join

[24] Talev, L. "Иван Вазов като консерватор." *Петте кьошета,* Aug 25, 2015. Accessed Mar 6, 2017. http://www.5corners.eu/2015/08/vazov/.

NATO and the EU, we can easily attribute representations of Russian villains as both part of the Bulgarian discourse as well as adopted from the Cold War legacy. In *Glass Home*, Agent Kolev of the Bulgarian State Agency for National Security (SANS) could easily be mistaken for a *кагэбэшник* (kagebeshnik; Eng. literally *KGB'er*, a person affiliated with the KGB). SANS is the successor of the Committee for State Security (CSS), which was a direct tool of totalitarianism in Socialist Bulgaria with connections to the KGB. Today, SANS sites counterintelligence, anticorruption and antiterrorism as their main focal points,[25] and in 2016, the Protection of Classified Information law was modified to restrict access of former CSS members (plentiful and prolific in all spheres of Bulgarian political and cultural life) to such information.[26]

> **Agent Kolev:** You know, NASA has blown millions into discovering a pen, which would not leak in space. The Russians use this. *[shows pencil]*
>
> **Dimitar:** *[sardonically]* Ingenious.
>
> **Agent Kolev:** All simple answers are ingenious.

Kolev, as a fictional representative of SANS, is directly responsible for Dimitar Kasabov's medical care after the assassination, his disappearance, upkeep in London as well as his return to Sofia. Kolev is calculated, crafty and mysterious, with a wide network of contacts. It is not always clear whether his actions are just, but Kolev himself only cares about puzzles. Herein lies his difference to a stereotypical KGB baddie: he is in fact not on the bad side at all. Neither is he on the good, really; the assassination stunt is enacted on behalf of SANS and aimed at catching the big mafia fish Mister X.

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[25] State Agency for National Security, Republic of Bulgaria. Accessed Mar 23, 2017. http://www.dans.bg/.
[26] "Закон за изменение и допълнение на Закона за защита на класифицираната информация." Bulgarian Legislation. Accessed Mar 26, 2017. http://www.parliament.bg/bg/laws/ID/15826.

> **Stavrev:** What type of truck was it?
>
> **Kamen:** Orange, old, Russian.
>
> **Stavrev:** ZIL, KrAZ, GAZ, KAMAZ…?
>
> **Kamen:** They are all the same to me.
>
> **Stavrev:** Well, that is also what democracy has taught you: cannot distinguish between a Lada and a Zhiguli.

Stavrev, a former police officer through and through with an iron (almost totalitarian) grip on leadership, is the poor man's equivalent of an agent: a shopping mall security guard convinced (not entirely wrongly) that intrigue and conspiracy are all around. Both Stavrev and Kolev exult admiration toward Soviet technology, usually comparing it favourably to that of the United States. Both are also mostly very distrustful of modernisation, democracy and globalisation. The major difference between Kolev and Stavrev is that the cultural traits exhibited by Kolev are pan-Slavic, whereas Stavrev is treated as an authentically Bulgarian character, obviously fallen behind in terms of progress and modernisation.

> **Stavrev:** Eh, Kolev, Kolev! All your life you're on Slav Defense. Did you not learn anything else, huh?

Stavrev also verbalises an obstacle facing all personages in *Glass Home*, except Kamen: poor knowledge of English. Considering the amount of English company names (M-Center, In Flame, MaryKate Consulting, Hotel Beauty, and others), adopted terminology and knowledge of popular culture of the English-speaking world, the glocal cultural identity in Bulgaria is still seemingly a work in progress, even for the younger generation. After returning from the States, where he relocated in order to study at university, Dani requests more responsibility in his father's company and Dimitar asks him "have you learned any English?" – as if studying in what is also described as a very prestigious university programme in the States does not automatically require that knowledge. Contrastively, Stavrev speaks Russian, as it turns out only in the fourth season. It is not surprising in itself (Russian was widely taught in Bulgaria during the Soviet era), but it is emblematic that his linguistic abilities have not been presented earlier. In the Bulgarian context, looking

eastward is no longer connected with internationalisation and thus is an unwanted identity marker. Turning away from a Balkan or Slavic identification as well as caving under international pressure to globalise, the cultural identity of Bulgarians is neither here nor there. "Internationalisation" is slapped like a sticker on packaging, without really considering the demands for such a goal, whereas old labels are considered authentic, but shameful and outdated. Bay Ganyo remains Bay Ganyo, even in his fancy clothing.

> **Technician:** It cuts out the frequencies of the voice, so that only the background is audible.
>
> **Stavrev:** The what?
>
> **Technician:** The *back-ground*.
>
> **Stavrev:** Ah… *[to Kamen]* I told you, didn't I? [He is] The best!

Revealed as Mayor in running Konstantin Cholakov in the second season, Mister X attempts to illegally acquire the mall using Nikolai as his agent on the inside in the first season. In the process, Dani is kidnapped to force Kamen to sell his and Boryana's shares of the mall. Nikolai is caught and imprisoned for the kidnapping, but the man behind the orchestration, Cholakov, is revealed as the leader of a fictional party "New Beginning for Bulgaria", which by name closely mirrors actual Bulgarian political parties created in the 2000s. Some real examples include the National Movement for Stability and Progress (2001), the New Era (2004), Attack (2005), the National Alliance "Victory" (2005), National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (2011), and Democrats for Responsibility, Freedom and Tolerance (2016), et cetera. The names often intend to communicate a new direction in Bulgarian politics, but *Glass Home* characters, not unlike Bulgarians, remain sceptical. The politicians are often presented as literally two-dimensional characters on television, who occasionally give the viewers an update on the "visible" changes in Bulgaria and its capital, as well as the latest political objectives in the fight against organised crime and corruption. Usually (as mentioned in chapter 5.2) their postulations are interrupted as someone turns the television off. From the spectator's point of view,

the political statements are void of anything profound to comprehend; they are once again just rot masked as gold.

> **Ralchev:** If you encounter problems understanding Bulgarian law, I will be happy to help.
>
> **Kamen:** I'm managing.
>
> **Ralchev:** I don't think so. This is not America, Mister Kasabov. Making deals with the defendant without the knowledge of the court – very bad.

The gaze westward presented in the data is at the very least as perplexing as the gaze to the east. Upon Kamen's return to M-Center as his father's heir, he is treated as a person with as much business knowledge as the absence of Bulgarian cultural identity attributed to him (see chapter 5.4). *Glass Home*'s eulogy to progress and consumerist society is simultaneously a eulogy to the "first world". However, the image of that world is not explored, simply assumed: cable television, cheerleaders, constitutional rights, cars… The deeper understanding of a shared Slavic cultural space, Soviet history or – god forbid! – anything closer to home like Balkan is rejected and substituted for a one-dimensional, simplistic flickering image on a screen. What is "America" – this geopolitically inaccurately termed space, which should instead be called "the United States" or "North America", unless one wishes to refer to the entirety of two continents? Kamen's business contacts in the US as well as his judicial skills are considered an asset in the first season, when he joins the M-Center partnership and brings fresh ideas to what was considered by his father's partners a stagnating business. In this respect, the US represents the wind of change and modernity in *Glass Home*. However, most of the time it does not seem to represent almost anything at all, bar from a marker of differentiation for Kamen. There are contradictory statements in the data, referring to the US as constitutional, but in another instance referring to its judicial system as almost corrupt. What I incur from the data is that the US is culturally still felt as quite distant, and the gaze westward for Bulgarians is mostly a gaze pointed at Europe.

> **Agent Kolev:** We now also have cable television, criminality, traffic jams here… You will not miss America.

There is an argument for my postulation above in that there has never been as much support in Bulgaria for joining NATO than there has been for joining the EU, and the BSP as well as citizens have been surprisingly critical of NATO in the noughties. This was partially because Bulgarians sided with Serbs in the Kosovo conflict, and partially due to the reforms demanded of Bulgaria in order to join the organisation (Linden 2004). However, Bulgaria has also had the experience of being something not quite non-Europe, not a final dichotomy (Todorova 2009) in the east/west discourse. The attitudes of Bulgarians towards EU economy, democracy and future possibilities have been as overwhelmingly positive as their attitudes to the same aspects of the Bulgarian society have been overwhelmingly negative. The European Commission's Eurobarometer surveys[27] show that in 2013, 94% of Bulgarians estimated the quality of life to be worse Bulgaria than in the EU. Around 40% of Bulgarians are consistently satisfied with the EU economy, whereas less than 10% are pleased with the economy in their home country. Simultaneously, the significance of Bulgaria within the EU is not felt strongly and many demands are perceived as unjustly unrealistic, but the consensus is that "we are better off together" than alone. Bulgaria has even turned to national branding within the European context, also displaying in it the east/west "power imbalance". The gaze

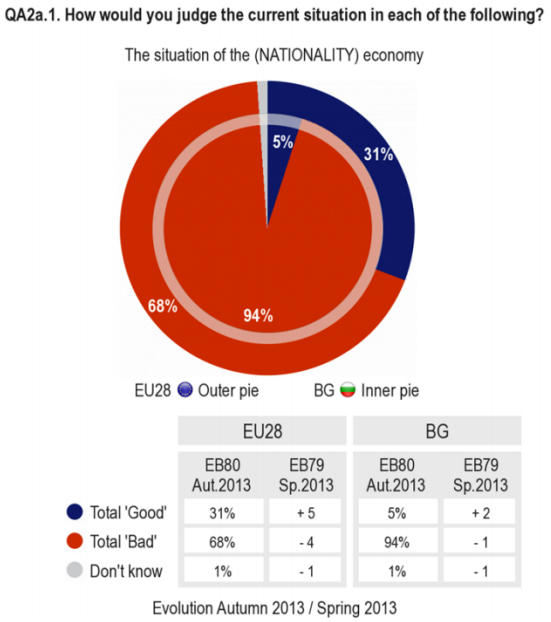

Figure 2: Eurobarometer, November 2013. Accessed March 27, 2017.

[27] Standard Eurobarometer. Accessed Mar 26, 2017. http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_arch_en.htm.

of Bulgaria is directly turned to Europe: its national branding has been diverged from symbols of ancient heritage to the "western" model of urban modernity (Kaneva 2007).

> **Dimitar:** And how is Strasbourg? For a young man like you it would seem a bit boring, quiet, like in a village.
>
> **EU representative:** It might be a village, but it's French.

The loyalty towards the EU is projected in the data as positivist views on Europe (even villages there are better than in Bulgaria). *Glass Home* politicians gleefully present the adequacy of governmental measures undertaken in order to meet EU criteria. The pillar of Mayor Sarafov's success in the presidential campaign rests on his ability to secure Sofia as the next European Centre of the Commission for Neighbourhood Policy. The confusion over what this centre actually does or represents seems to be a secondary concern. Perhaps Dimitar's comment also takes a stab at the complicated EU terminology and expresses the aforementioned feeling of insignificance within the EU: whether it enjoys a more complimentary status than the Bulgarian government or not, it is still perceived as an intricate institution with not much connection to the daily life of Bulgarians. Additionally, the absence of infrastructure for realising the candidacy feat is duly noted by Mayor Sarafov, who proceeds to secure Sofia's candidacy by falsifying documents. Adherence to the rhetoric of "not quite Europeanness" is manifest in the dialogue.

> **Dimitar:** I'm talking about the candidacy of Sofia for Centre of… hold on, what was it… the Commission for Neighbourhood Policy.
>
> **Mayor Sarafov:** Yes, there is a project like that, but I don't believe it will happen.
>
> **Dimitar:** Why?
>
> **Mayor Sarafov:** The requirements are very complex. Plus, Bucharest and Vilnius are also candidates.

Where does Bulgarian cultural identity stand then, in light of these relations? If the Balkanist discourse conceptualises the Balkans as a "semi-other", then it is

understandable that, as a self-colonising culture, the Bulgarian identity within Europe would then be "an incomplete self" (Todorova 2009, 18) or "semi-self" at the crossroads of powerful actors to the west and the east. The east is rejected as archaic and unmodern (albeit stable and reliable) in favour of the west, whose motivations are catered to without proper internalisation of the so-called "alien values". The semi-self is emblematic of a small game board piece – drifting from one conflict to another, one process to another without much agency of its own. It does not consider itself a player even in its own game. Instead it is shuttled between spaces of the board by an omniscient force – a higher, complete self, which is the centre and the only reference point.

6 Discussion and suggestions for further research

The concept of national identity presupposes a concept of a nation based on a civilisation model and grand narrative of development created by Western Europe, specifically emphasised and mythologised during the 19th century. The birth of the Bulgarian nation-state (comparable to other former Soviet satellites and Socialist Republics) took on a different trajectory, thus often missing the mark on stipulations dictated by those nation-states, who had already reached "development". The painful years of transition to democracy and market economy, which arguably have not ended yet, have intensified the image of Bulgaria as a distorted mirror of European development. Additionally, even though western democracies have never established military colonial rule in Bulgaria, the nation-state was built on victimhood narratives based on nearly 500 years under Ottoman rule. Due to these processes, Bulgarian national and cultural identity is founded in absences of civilisation, but only according to the measuring stick of development itself – "the west". 21st century Bulgarian academics, inevitably influenced by European and North American scientific communities and ways of perception, do not differ from the cultural elites of the Bulgarian National Revival: they continue to lament a certain loss of culture and adoption of consumerism. The divide between the cultural elites and the so-called "common people" is palpable within this discourse, and so is the reversed Orientalist/Balkanist gaze. Thus, socio-economic

issues are extremely relevant when discussing Bulgarian cultural identity. The agrarian society of Socialist times has struggled to find a technologically advanced and politically developed modern identity, and instead been stuck in-between in modernisation by imitation.

The European model with its "alien values" made universal and its symbolic economy does not use economics lingo accidentally: the model was built on economic power, which was created through domination of weaker economies and led to the illusion of superiority, manifesting itself through nationalism, egotism, denial of past failings, and lack of understanding for anything divergent from the established norm. Based on the *Glass Home* data and background research I have conducted for this study I dare to claim that, instead of confusing "the west" with God, the self-colonised cultures (identically to "the west" at an earlier stage in history) have confused liberal economy and the nation-state with God. In stating this, I want to emphasise both the importance of national and cultural imagination as well as socio-economic factors, yet I believe applying the self-colonisation metaphor to Bulgarian self-identification processes brands Bulgarians as victims without agency or capabilities of having a "true" and "whole" understanding of their own cultural identities.

Analysing a recent product of popular culture, created by and for Bulgarian viewers, I have established that Bulgarian cultural symbols are outdated (folk music and dance, cuisine) and distant from the city dwellers, whereas urban and globalised Bulgaria has little to offer in terms of a cohesive cultural narrative *à la* National Revival. The bumps and fractality of Bulgarian self-identification are visible in the way the "western" perspective is constantly referred to in a manner which can indeed be interpreted as self-colonisation. I am simply left wondering where to go next. The multifaceted nature of being Bulgarian, which includes feeling pride and shame, gusto and despondence simultaneously, is what could create a real *fictiõ* – one not simply based on victories and discoveries, but also human error and shared embarrassment. Attributing markers of self-colonisation to Bulgarian identity contrastively presupposes an ideal identity building process, which would be based on bloated pride and national/cultural superiority – the colonisers' way of

constructing reality – which is just as distorted and differentiating as the Orientalist/Balkanist discourse. Would thus the alternative to self-colonisation – self-proclamation – really be the more wholesome option? Also, if we accept self-colonisation, do we not resign ourselves to it?

The biggest challenge of constructing a new Bulgarian self in the 21st century is inclusion. Othering and exclusion have dominated the grand narrative of European nationhood for too long. In terms of national identity building, "the west" is also holding on to essentialist notions of unified cultures and pure ethnicities, and the effects of the narrative of the centre have been staggering on the periphery. Being at the crossroads of great powers, Bulgarians have assumed transitional subjectivity between an unwanted, attributed (from the outside) identity and an impossible and highly problematic ideal. In fact, the Balkans have become the periphery of its own imagination. The internalised re-presence of a representation is void of cultural substance, which cannot be discovered within a postmodern, consumerist society, but leaning on the pillars of cultural identification of the 19th century is beginning to be an outdated tactic. The results of this transitional state are rootlessness, mimicry, resignation and migration (also existential), as well as the development of "incomplete selves" or semi-identities in the region. By consolidating the multiplicity of cultural belonging and embracing the kaleidoscope of possible identities, Bulgarian self-identification could perhaps finally be built on presences.

My suggestions for further research can be divided into two themes: further research in the field of Bulgarian television productions and their relation to public opinion, as well as further research into *Glass Home* from two additional perspectives, for which there was not enough space in this paper. Firstly, within the first theme, a comparison between *Glass Home* and other Bulgarian TV series of the 2010s could be fruitful in order to explore similarities and differences in the representation of Bulgarian identities. Specifically, the case of migration could prove an interesting focal point for this research, as it seems to be a popular and important topic. Secondly, the online analyses of the series by Bulgarian viewers (in forums, blogs, chats, et cetera) could provide data for establishing whether the identity representations are adopted by viewers or not. Within the second theme,

the gender and the moral perspective already visible in my data would be an interesting topic for exploration. Focusing specifically on the *connection* between gender and morality, one could further delve into female characters of *Glass Home* in order to uncover the representations of Bulgarian womanhood. Additionally, a study of the connection between morality and Bulgarian identity could present an interesting perspective to self-stigmatisation.

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